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Emotional Experience and Propositional Content

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ABSTRACT: Those arguing for the existence of non-propositional content appeal to emotions for support, although there has been little engagement in those debates with developments in contemporary theory of emotion, specifically in connection with the kind of mental states that emotional experiences are. Relatedly, within emotion theory, one finds claims that emotional experiences *per se* have non-propositional content without detailed argument. This paper argues that the content of emotional experience is propositional in a weak sense, associated with aspectual experience and correctness conditions. Furthermore, it provides an interpretation of purely-objectual emotional experiences which satisfies this weak view of propositional content.

Introduction

Propositionalism is often characterized as the view that all intentional attitudes, like belief, hope, and desire, are relations to propositions. As such, the class of intentional attitudes would be exhausted by the class of propositional attitudes.¹ Whatever the status of that view, given its ostensible commitment to a relational view of intentionality and the metaphysical reality of the propositions to which a subject is related, there is a view in the vicinity we can call *propositionalism about content*. According to this less demanding view, the intentional content characteristic of the relevant intentional states has a propositional *structure* and therefore intentional states should be characterized as having propositional content. For propositionalism about content to be true, all intentional content should be propositional content.²

Non-propositionalism about content can be framed as a denial of the aforementioned view: some intentional states have a content which does not have a propositional structure – intentional content is not *ipso facto* propositional content. There is a further requirement to specify what non-propositional content amounts to (i.e. what

¹ See Perry 1994 387-8; Stoljar 1996: 191.

² See Searle 1983; 2018: 259-71; Sinhababu 2015: 1-16.

its structure is, if not propositional). Perhaps the relevant intentional states have purely objectual content, and so are objectual rather than propositional attitudes.³ Alternatively, perhaps the relevant intentional states are directed towards unbound properties which don't qualify any object, and so have purely property content.⁴

Theorists arguing for non-propositional content often appeal to emotions.⁵ While there may be examples of propositional emotions, for example, 'fearing that the stock market will crash', there are arguably a range of non-propositional emotions. Examples often take objectual form, for example, 'Bill fears snakes' or 'Bill loves Sally'. If there are emotions with non-propositional content, then propositionalism about content is false – the content of some intentional states is non-propositional. Contrastingly, if the emotions in question have propositional content, then one evidence base for non-propositionalism is removed.

Given the significance of either conclusion, it is surprising that discussion of emotions within the context of debates surrounding (non)propositional content have proceeded without detailed engagement with developments in contemporary theory of emotion, specifically in connection with the kind of mental states that emotional experiences are. Relatedly, within emotion theory one finds claims that emotional experiences *per se* are (i) non-propositional attitudes, (ii) have non-propositional content or (iii) exhibit a kind of non-propositional intentionality, without detailed argument, or consideration of what such claims entail.⁶

This paper remedies this by clarifying the content of emotional experience within the context of debates surrounding (non)propositional content. There are arguments for

³ For defenders of non-propositional content along objectual lines see Crane 2007; 2009: 452-469; Montague 2007: 503-18; Grzankowski 2016a: 314-28; 2016b: 819-39; 2018: 134-151; *forthcoming*. The term objectual attitude comes from Forbes 2002: 141-183.

⁴ See Mark Johnston's (2004: 113-83) discussion of 'brain grey', the supposed visual experience a subject has when they have their eyes closed, for an example of an intentional experience of an unbounded colour property. Alternatively, Angela Mendelovici (2013: 135–157) argues for a similar view of moods, which on her view lack particular objects but are nonetheless directed towards putatively 'unbound' affective properties.

⁵ See Montague 2007: 503-18; Crane 2009: 452-469; Grzankowski 2016a: 314-28; 2016b: 819-39.

⁶ See Döring 2014: 133; Deonna and Teroni 2012: 78-9; Goldie 2009: 237, 238, fn.1; Tappolet 2000: Ch.6; 2012: 329; 2016: Ch.1. In emotion psychology see Marcel and Lambie 2002: 239; Frijda 2009: 268. Such claims reflect a stronger form of non-propositionalism about emotions, namely that emotions *qua* emotions necessarily have non-propositional content (see section 3 for discussion).

taking emotional *experiences* as the primary object of inquiry when it comes to philosophical study of the emotions, although I don't rehearse those here.⁷ The minimal motivation for considering the content of emotional *experiences*, rather than emotions *per se*, proceeds from there being a question about the structure of their content *as experiences*.

The specific aim of this paper is to argue that emotional experiences have propositional content, although of a weak kind, associated with aspectual experience and correctness conditions. The thesis is provisional because propositionalism about emotional content requires that *all* emotional experiences have propositional content. To show this false, non-propositionalism about emotional content needs only one counter-example. Non-propositionalism can, therefore, accept pluralism about emotional content – some being propositional, some non-propositional. Propositionalism about emotional content must deny such pluralism, and so has to provide propositional interpretations of supposed non-propositional cases. Given this, the aim here is merely to make a *prima facie* case for propositionalism about the content of emotional experiences.

Let me briefly note further points concerning the motivation for the paper. Someone might ask why it is important to argue that emotional experiences have a form of propositional content, beyond staking a position, *qua* emotional experiences, in the debate concerning propositionalism vs non-propositionalism. As will become apparent in the course of the discussion, in arguing that emotional experiences have a form of propositional content we connect to, and provide clarification on, several issues that are of significant interest to philosophers of emotion and mind. These are as follows: how emotions represent their objects and the structure of their content; the type of mental state they are; whether they necessarily include doxastic components; whether the emotional experiences we enjoy might be of a piece with affective states of non-human animals and human infants; and the kinds of subjective capacities implicated by emotional experiences. This topic, therefore, provides fertile ground for tackling some of the most important and contested questions concerning emotional experiences.

The roadmap is as follows. The first section clarifies the 'weak' notion of propositional content I operate with and clarifies related issues. Section 2 discusses emotional intentionality, experiences and reports. Section 3 argues that emotional experience is a form of aspectual experience, making the case that its content is propositional. Finally, section 4 argues that purely-objectual emotional experiences admit of an interpretation which satisfies the weak view of propositional content.

⁷ See Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch.1 and Ch.9.

1. Initial Clarifications

1.1 *Weak Propositional content*

To say a mental state X is a propositional attitude is to say that we can specify the state with three components: a subject-term (S), a transitive attitudinal verb term (V), and a complete proposition (<p>), which follows a that-clause. For example, Bill believes that <p> is formalized as S V's that <p>.⁸ The propositional content here is <p>. As it is often glossed, the subject stands in the relevant attitudinal relation to the proposition <p>, and as such is correctly ascribed a propositional attitude. However, views on the nature of propositional content, and the relation the subject bears to this content, go beyond a specification of the correct form of propositional attitude reports. They specify what it is for a proposition to figure as the content of an intentional state, and so what propositional content amounts to.

There are various views on what propositional content amounts to, however my focus here is on a *weak* form:

Weak propositional content (WPC): intentional state X has propositional content if S is intentionally directed, via the relevant intentional attitude, toward an object (e.g. physical particular, person, event, or state of affairs including such things) under a specific aspect or mode of presentation. As such, the content is a *full state of affairs*, which sets its correctness or evaluability conditions.⁹

⁸ See King 2014: 6–7; Schiffer 2003: 12–5.

⁹ See Sellars 1963: section 16; Searle 1983: 35; 2018: 259-271; Grzankowski 2012: 374-391; 2016a: 314-328; *forthcoming*: 2; Richard 2013: 702-19. Let me briefly note that there are stronger views of propositional content. According to one, an intentional state X has propositional content if S stands in an attitudinal relation to a full proposition, as an abstract (particular), metaphysically real, mind-independent object (call this *superstrong propositional content*) - see Frege 1984 [1922]: 351-72; Russell 1903; Moore 1899: 176-193. Alternatively, an intentional state X has propositional content if S is intentionally related, via the relevant intentional attitude, toward a sentence-like mental content 'in the head', which takes the form of a full proposition (call this *strong propositional content*) - see Fodor 1975; 1983; Chalmers 1996: 19; Larson 2002. Whatever the status of these stronger views as applied to intentional states *per se*, their prospects as applied to paradigmatic emotional experiences is poor – typical emotional experiences are neither relations to abstract mind-independent objects nor attitudes towards sentence-like mental contents 'in the head'. In any case, my focus here will be on the applicability of the WPC view to emotional experience.

On this view, the relevant intentional state is directed toward an ‘object’ under specific aspects or modes of presentation. For example, the relevant mode of presentation in the case of ‘S believes that <grass is green>’ is the attributive ‘green’, as a predicated property. The content is the way the object is (re)presented by the relevant intentional state, under the relevant aspect or mode of presentation. So understood, the propositional content determines the correctness conditions for the intentional state; the belief is correct *iff* grass is green, that is when the proposition <grass is green> is true. The proposition is, therefore, the truth-maker, as the *full state of affairs*, and the conditions under which the belief is correct need to be the same as those under which the relevant state of affairs obtains, i.e., a fact. Finally, on this view, an intentional state having propositional content is equivalent to its having correctness conditions (and its having non-propositional content is equivalent to its lacking such conditions).¹⁰

Note, someone might object, isn’t this WPC view uninterestingly weak, such that it might be preferable to just talk about *representations* instead. As we shall in section 3, there are distinctive dimensions to this WPC view that go beyond a minimal notion of a representational state. Further to this, it should be noted that talk of representations is talk about the states themselves, whereas talk of propositional content, and the WPC view specifically, concerns the *structure* of the intentional or representational contents of the relevant states.

1.2 *Manifest content and specifications*

Let me now emphasize a distinction between the structure of the *manifest content* of an intentional state itself (the object presented, as it is presented to the subject) and the structure of a (typically linguistic) specification of that content as given in attitude reports, what I call the *displayed content*.¹¹ Eliding this distinction has consequences when determining the structure of intentional content given the following argument:

(P1) Intentional State X has a *manifest content* – it presents something as being
someway to the subject.

¹⁰ See Grzankowski 2016a: 316 and Siegel 2011: 70-76 who draw this connection explicitly. Also, see my discussion in section 3 and 4 for more on the connection between propositional content and correctness conditions.

¹¹ See Sainsbury 2018: 23 and Iacona 2003: 325-51 for a similar distinction.

(P2) In an attitude report or ascription of X, the content component can be specified as what follows a that-clause, as a (sentential) complement to the relevant attitude-verb.

(P3) The structure of the surface grammar of specifications of the content of intentional states (the *displayed content* as it figures in reports or attributions) either just is, or is a sufficiently reliable guide to, the structure of the *manifest content* of the intentional state *in itself*. Plainly: a content which can be specified in propositional form has *in itself* a propositional structure.

(Conclusion) Intentional State X has propositional content.

(P3) makes what I call the *specifier's assumption*. One might think such an assumption benefits propositionalism of some stripe. However, accepting the specifier's assumption also provides the non-propositionalist with an argument for their view:

(P1): Intentional State X has a *manifest content* – it presents something as being somehow to the subject.

(P2*): In an attitude report or ascription of X, the content component *cannot* be specified as what follows a that-clause, as a (sentential) complement to the relevant attitude-verb.

(P3*): The structure of the surface grammar of specifications of the content of intentional states (the *displayed content* as it figures in reports or ascriptions) either just is, or is a sufficiently reliable guide to, the structure of the *manifest content* of the intentional state *in itself*. Simply: a content which can be specified in *non-propositional form* has *in itself* a *non-propositional structure*.

(Conclusion*): Intentional state X has non-propositional content.

So, the non-propositionalist needs specifications of intentional states, as given in attitude reports and ascriptions, that resist being *displayed* propositionally. This could involve showing that fully explicated propositional reconstructions of purported objectual attitudes either fail or presuppose more primitive attitudes that are irreducibly objectual.¹²

Is there reason to accept the specifier's assumption? In the case of the traditional propositional attitudes (e.g. belief, desire) arguably there is. Consider a moment of

¹² See Montague 2007: 503-18 and Grzankowski 2016a: 314-328. Montague (2007: 504) and Grzankowski (2016a: 320) make the specifier's assumption and within this framework provide arguments for irreducible objectual attitudes (cf. Sinhababu 2015: 8-1).

memory loss, where I can't remember the capital of France. I then have a 'eureka' moment and report or otherwise express (say in speech) that Paris is the capital of France. When I do, there is arguably a proposition which structures the manifest content of my thought, which I am expressing or otherwise displaying, namely that <Paris is the capital of France>. In such cases, the structure of the surface grammar of a specification – the *displayed content* – plausibly mirrors the structure of the manifest content of the state *in itself*. Further to this, in the case of conscious thought, explicit assent to a thought-content and a specification of its content (or otherwise reporting it) often aren't different things. My specifying the content of my thought can be one way of assenting to it such that they coincide. So, one reason we can 'read off' the structure of the *manifest content* of an intentional state from the surface grammatical structure of specifications of that content (the *displayed content*) is because for traditional propositional attitudes displaying the content can be a way that content is made manifest.

Whether the above considerations ultimately justify the specifier's assumption for the traditional propositional attitudes is beyond the scope of this paper. It suffices to note that it is more problematic for *non-doxastic* (i.e. not necessarily belief or judgement involving) intentional experiences. Consider that a non-doxastic visual experience of a red ball is one thing, a report or ascription, involving a specification of its content, is something of a fundamentally different kind. Specifying the content of my perceptual experience, say in a perceptual report, is not and could never be, a way of having the perceptual experience. In such cases, the structure of the surface grammar of a specification of the content of the intentional state (the *displayed content*), leaves it open to further investigation what the structure of the *manifest content* of that intentional state itself is.

So, without a further argument for making the specifier's assumption for all intentional states, we can't simply read off the structure of the *manifest content* of non-doxastic intentional experiences from the structure (propositional or otherwise) of specifications of their content *as displayed*. So, if the specifier's assumption is questionable for non-doxastic intentional experience, then both the propositionalist and non-propositionalist have to go beyond exclusively logico-linguistic considerations to provide arguments for their positions. They will have to concern themselves with the experiences themselves.¹³ With these clarifications made I move on to consider emotions.

¹³ Sinhababu (2015: 14) makes a similar point.

2. Emotional Intentionality and Emotional Experiences

Contemporary emotion theorists regard typical emotions as intentional states, in at least the sense that they are directed towards objects, such as physical particulars, persons or animals, events, and states of affairs. Emotion theorists label these the particular objects of emotions, as their target or focus.¹⁴ Note though, particular objects should not be confused with physical particulars and talk of particular objects does not commit one to a positive metaphysical claim. To say the particular object of an episode of fear is a bear can be correct, and yet the bear can be imaginary. So, as per standard theory of intentionality, emotions can be about non-existents. Furthermore, the notion of a particular object should not be taken to entail the idea of specificity, either in terms of the emotion necessarily targeting a single thing or something which satisfies a definite description. Nonetheless, the idea of a particular object captures the thought that the emotion is about *something*, and so has intentional content.

So, emotions, on this minimal conception of their intentionality, have intentional content and are therefore candidates for having (non)propositional content. If emotions were merely non-intentional raw feels they wouldn't have propositional content, but they wouldn't have non-propositional content either – they simply wouldn't be contentful states. All parties to the debate should, therefore, accept that emotions are intentional states, and the minimal conception of their intentionality is a reasonable starting point.

For the moment, this basic outline of emotional intentionality suffices. I now apply the conclusion of the previous subsection to emotions. The result is a distinction between the structure of the *manifest content* of emotional experiences and the structure of the *displayed content* of reports or ascriptions thereof. However, before this, let me lay out the dialectical landscape.

If we hold the specifier's assumption under suspicion then, we need to distinguish theses about the structure of the manifest content of intentional states from theses about the structure of the displayed content as it figures in sentences which attribute them. Given our interest in the content of emotional experience, we get two views:

- (a) The uninteresting propositional view: all emotion *reports* take propositional form and therefore such *reports* have propositional content.
- (b) The interesting propositional view: all emotional *experiences* have propositional content.

¹⁴ See Lyons 1980: 104-6; de Sousa 1987: 116; Teroni 2007: 395-415.

(a) is a trivial view, and unless we make the specifier's assumption there is no route from (a) to (b). This cuts both ways, and we end up with the same distinction concerning non-propositionalism about emotions:

- (c) The uninteresting non-propositional view: emotion *reports* sometimes have non-propositional form and so such *reports* sometimes have non-propositional content.
- (d) The interesting non-propositional view: emotional *experiences* sometimes have non-propositional content.

Again, unless we make the specifier's assumption, there is no route from (c) to (d). I take it that (b) and (d) are the 'interesting' views. From here on, I consider the question: 'do emotional experiences have exclusively propositional content?'. Answering this question in the affirmative gives us (b), in the negative (d). To get a sense for what motivates either answer, we need a firmer grasp on what emotional experiences are. So, I now say something about emotion reports and emotional experiences.

Emotion reports come in various kinds and a range of first and third-person forms. At the discursive end, we have emotion diaries consisting of first-person descriptive accounts. Similarly, consider the written or verbally communicated emotion reports given in empirical psychological experiments.¹⁵ More simply, emotion reports can consist in one-off exclamations like 'that was scary'. Finally, introspecting one's emotion is a kind of 'inner' emotion report. Introspection roughly consists in a higher-order cognitive-intentional state which takes the first-order intentional experience as its object, moving from experiential *awareness of*, to conceptually articulated *knowledge that*.¹⁶ Introspective reports cannot occur in the third-person; I cannot introspectively report on someone else's emotions. Yet we often report in the third-person that 'Bill was overcome with fear', or 'Bill was pining after Sally'.

The above reports are usually of occurrent, episodic, emotional experiences, as first-person states of phenomenal awareness that have a *what-it-is-likeness*, or phenomenal character. As it is often put, there is *something it is like* to be the subject of episodic fear, shame, regret, admiration etc., and the reports above are (often) reports of these

¹⁵ See Davitz 1969.

¹⁶ See Dretske 1997: 39-65.

phenomenal states. The precise nature of emotional phenomenology is a complex issue, especially accounting for how it relates to the intentionality of emotional experience.¹⁷ For present purposes, it suffices to note that as the subject of object-directed sadness, for example, one typically experiences – in addition to a manifest particular object – somatic sensations (e.g., a lump in the throat) and a range of other phenomenal components and affective qualities. In any case, emotional experiences are intentional conscious states with a felt phenomenology and as such, they are occurrent states enjoyed by individuals at particular times.¹⁸

If the reports considered above are reports of emotional experiences (they are ways of putting those experiences on display), then clearly, they are *not* identical with the first-order experiences themselves. This is borne out by the fact that I need not have, and typically won't have, any of the aforementioned phenomenology when reporting the emotion.¹⁹

Now consider a different kind of emotion report, which can also be framed in the first and third-person. In conversation, I am asked 'which animals are you afraid of?' I respond 'I'm afraid of snakes'. We don't usually take such reports to be of occurrent emotional experiences. No snake need have been recently present, and I need not imagine a snake, so precipitating an emotional response. Instead, I'm reporting an emotional disposition, the actualization of which is an emotional experience with snakes as the particular object. I'm saying something like: I have a liability to respond with fear when snakes are (or seem to be) present, such that if there was a snake in front of me now I'd be afraid (given the satisfaction of the relevant background conditions). Now, consider a third-person report of a similar kind; a psychologist writing up his notes documents that 'Bill is pathologically afraid of snakes'. Again, it is implausible that this reports an occurrent emotional episode. Instead, what it documents an emotional disposition.

More can be said about the nature and origins of emotional dispositions, and their relation to emotional experiences.²⁰ Although if they are construed as mental states with intentional contents, then there is a question about whether the structure of their content

¹⁷ See Mitchell 2018 for an account of this connection.

¹⁸ See Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch.1; Goldie 2002: Ch.2; Montague 2009: 171-92.

¹⁹ Emotion reports should be distinguished from emotional expressions (e.g. facial expressions, action-ready bodily stances; see Frijda 1987: Ch.2).

²⁰ See Deonna and Teroni 2009 for an overview.

is (non)propositional.²¹ Whatever we say about these issues, however, it has no direct bearing on our question of whether emotional *experience* has (exclusively) propositional content.

These distinctions between (i) occurrent experiences and reports of them, (ii) occurrent experiences and dispositions, and (iii) dispositions and reports of them, may seem uncontroversial. However, formulations of propositionalism and non-propositionalism about emotional content don't keep them in check. For example, if the favoured examples of third-person reports of 'Bill fears Snakes' or 'Bill loves Sally' are the candidate objectual emotions with non-propositional content, we need to know whether the relevantly structured content is that of a disposition or an experience.²² If it is the former, then we have not answered whether emotional *experiences* have exclusively propositional content. If it is the latter, then we need a further reason why the structure of the surface grammar of the intentional content as it figures in these reports (the *displayed content* as putatively purely-objectual in form) is a reliable guide to the structure of the *manifest content* of the experience – i.e. the specifier's assumption. If that assumption cannot be justified, we need further arguments for construing such cases as non-propositional. Section 4 considers such purely-objectual emotions. Before that, I present the case for applying the weaker view of propositional content to emotional experiences.

3. Emotional Experience and the WPC view

3.1 Three intuitions

Here are three intuitions an emotion theorist might have which could lead them to claim that emotional experience *qua* emotional experience cannot have propositional content.

Anti-doxastic intuition: The best sense that can be made of the claim that emotional experiences have propositional content is that they essentially involve the traditional

²¹ There is the germ of a distinctive idea here, namely that the content of emotional dispositions is significantly different from that of emotional experiences. Unfortunately, for reasons of space, I won't pursue this issue here, although I take it as more plausible that emotional dispositions could be *purely objectual* (see fn.24).

²² See Crane 2007; 2009: 452-469; Montague 2007: 503-18; Grzankowski 2016a: 314-28; 2016b: 819-39; 2018: 134-151; *forthcoming*. These authors are not sufficiently attuned to these distinctions (cf. Grzankowski 2012: 18-22 who is explicit that he is discussing dispositional fear in the absence of an occurrent experience of fear, and provides an objectual attitude account). Some propositionalist accounts of emotions are also not sensitive to these distinctions (see, for example, Searle 1983; 2018: 259-271; Sinhababu 2015: 13-4).

propositional attitudes (e.g. belief, judgement, desire).²³ But it is implausible that emotional experiences essentially involve (at least) beliefs or judgements. Emotional experiences are *non-doxastic*. So, the best way of resisting doxasticism about emotional experience is by rejecting propositionalism about emotional content.

Anti-conceptual intuition: If emotions have propositional contents, they will involve conceptual capacities. It is doubtful that human infants and non-human animals would meet the possession conditions for the concepts which would figure in the relevant propositional content, and yet they enjoy emotional experiences. So, it is best to deny that emotions have propositional content.²⁴

Anti-descriptive intuition: If emotions have propositional contents, they will be sentence-like descriptions. Having an emotional experience would be like reading the newspaper and this is phenomenologically incorrect. So, it is best to deny that emotions have propositional content.

All three intuitions get something right. They track the thought that an account of emotional content is implausible if it makes emotional experiences necessarily doxastic, (in some sense) conceptual, sentence-like states. They all resist the over-intellectualising of emotional experience.

However, they all depend on too demanding a conception of propositional content, and the related mental states and (conceptual) capacities this implicates, or so I argue. The goal of this section is to show that, on a WPC view, we can respect what is correct about these intuitions, while maintaining that emotional content is propositional. Before showing how, let me emphasize one point. If all that is meant by saying that emotional experiences exhibit non-propositional intentionality or are (or involve) non-propositional attitudes, is that they don't necessarily involve the familiar propositional attitudes (e.g. belief and desire), then the propositionalist about emotional content can agree, but can adopt a view that doesn't have this commitment (e.g. the WPC view considered presently).

²³ The belief-desire model of emotion is found in Searle 1983; 2018: 259-271; Gordon 1987; Marks 1982. For a range of reasons this view is out of favour (see Deonna and Teroni 2012: ch:3 for a critical overview; see also Goldie 2002: 72-83 and Montague 2009: 171-92)

²⁴ See Deigh 1994: 824-854.

3.2 A WPC view of emotional content

On the WPC view, an emotional experience would have propositional content *just in case* it was intentionally directed toward a particular object under a specific aspect or mode or presentation, where the content of the experience is a *full state of affairs* which sets its correctness conditions.

Connecting to views in emotion theory, it is now common-place to claim that emotional experiences have correctness conditions set by their intentional content.²⁵ So the WPC view is off to a good start. However, we need to know more about the aspectual dimension, which provides the relevant *full state of affairs*. On one view – the evaluative content view – the aspects under which the particular objects of emotional experiences are represented are thick evaluative properties, such as the *fearsome*, *disgusting*, *admirable*, *beautiful*, and *funny*. For example, in an emotional experience of fear, my fear represents Bill as *fearsome*; in admiration, my admiration represents my friend’s actions as *admirable*. Connecting to the point about correctness conditions, my occurrent fear of Bill is said to be correct *iff* Bill really is fearsome. Analogously, my occurrent admiration of a friend’s actions will be correct *iff* their actions really are admirable. So, the conditions under which the emotional experience is correct are the same as those under which the relevant propositional content obtains (e.g. Bill *really is* fearsome; my friend’s actions *really are* admirable). More can be said about the evaluative content view, but this outline suffices here.²⁶

It is also worth noting a different view. There are theorists who for various reasons resist specifying the manifest content of emotional experience in terms of particular objects represented as having (apparent) evaluative properties. Instead, it is claimed that emotional experiences represent their objects under evaluatively-relevant, non-evaluative properties. For example, in an occurrent episode of fear about an Alsatian, my fear would be directed toward the Alsatian under evaluatively-relevant aspects, such as its loud bark, sharp teeth, and impulsive behaviour.²⁷

²⁵ See Tappolet 2016: Ch.1; Deonna and Teroni 2012: 6-7, 77-79. Deonna and Teroni (2012: 79) claim that ‘emotions are often not directed at propositions’ but always have correctness conditions. As far as I can tell, they are concerned to deny what in fn.9 I called the *superstrong and strong* views of propositional content as applied to emotional experiences. I take it that they don’t intend to claim that emotions, at least in paradigmatic cases, are solely directed at their objects under no aspects or modes of presentation.

²⁶ See Tappolet 2016: Ch.1; Johnston 2001: 181-214; Poellner 2016: 1-28; Montague 2009: 171-92 for further discussion.

²⁷ See Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch.7.

Whichever view we take, the manifest content of emotional experience involves aspects or modes of presentation; the particular objects of emotional experiences are represented as possessing evaluative or evaluatively-relevant properties. Such experiences, therefore, represent *full states of evaluative (or evaluatively-relevant) affairs*, which set their correctness conditions. *Prima facie* then, emotional experience has propositional content on the WPC view insofar as it is a form of aspectual experience. For ease of expression, I talk of evaluative properties from here on in, but the discussion could be rephrased in terms of non-evaluative, evaluatively-relevant properties.

3.3 An argument against a WPC view

I now present an argument against the view under consideration which brings into focus two of the intuitions which we started this section with:

(P1) Emotional experience is a form of aspectual experience.

(P2) Insofar as (P1) is true, emotional experience has propositional content on the WPC view.

(P3) The best model for aspectual experience is ‘seeing as’ (or something analogous to it), and this requires (a) a cognitive act of predication, and (b) the application of the relevant concept in that predicative act.

(P4) Concerning (a), the model of ‘seeing as’ motivates parsing emotional experience as follows: (i) a non-emotional experience (e.g. a perception, imagination etc.) of the particular object and (ii) an emotional thought of the kind (X is E) – as a conscious act of evaluative predication. So, emotional experience is essentially thought involving.

(P5) Concerning (b), a condition of having the relevant aspectual emotional experience is having the relevant concepts, given conscious acts of predication require the subject to possess the concepts which figure in that predicative content.

(P6) However, if either (P4) or (P5) are correct regarding emotional experience, then we run afoul of the anti-doxastic and/or anti-conceptual intuitions.

(Conclusion) Given we respect these intuitions, emotional experience does not have propositional content, even on a WPC view.

This argument represents a challenge to the WPC view. The following discussion considers how the view can respond.

We can begin by arguing that (P3) operates with too demanding a conception of aspectual experience. Let me first consider how such a response plays out concerning (P4) – I come back to (P5) below.

The relevant model of aspectual experience need not be ‘seeing as’, if that necessarily parses aspectual experience into two components; namely, the ‘simple seeing’ of X and then a predicative thought ‘X is F’. Instead, the relevant model can be analogous to that of a perceptual experience of objects with phenomenal properties. One has a visual experience, for example, of a ‘table as brown’. But there is no suggestion that one typically enjoys a perceptual experience of a bare particular, the table *as such*, and then predicates it *as brown* in conscious thought deploying the concept ‘brown’. The specification of the content in the terms ‘table *as brown*’, might (wrongly) give that impression. But what one perceptually experiences – the manifest content – is a *brown table*. So, it is not evident that aspectual experience necessarily involves a thought with predicative content.²⁸ So, the relevant model of aspectual experience is not necessarily one which implicates thoughts, although it may involve the deployment of specific conceptual (re)identificatory capacities (as we shall see, this caveat creates further problems for the WPC view).

In the emotional case, the same move can be made. By understanding emotional experience as a type of aspectual experience, we need not commit to saying that it involves two components; namely, an experience (perceptual, imaginative etc.) of the particular object, and an emotional thought which predicates it as having the relevant evaluative property. There is no suggestion that, in fear, for example, one sees the dog and then predicates it in emotional thought as *dangerous*. The specification of the content in the terms ‘dog *as dangerous*’ might give that impression but the relevant emotional experience just presents the *dangerous dog*, the *beautiful painting*, the *admirable individual*.²⁹ As in the sense-perceptual case, these experiences, are not necessarily thought-involving, although they might involve the deployment of specific evaluative conceptual (re)identificatory capacities. For this move to be blocked, we would need a convincing argument showing that aspectual experience in the emotional case necessarily requires

²⁸ Even conceptualists like McDowell no longer claim this in the perceptual case (see his 2013: 144-57).

²⁹ We need a further account of *how* it does so – that is the kind of non-doxastic representational states that emotional experiences are, i.e., whether they are perceptual experiences, quasi-perceptual experiences, *sui generis* intentional experiences, *sui generis* bodily attitudes. This is a complicated question that cannot be dealt with here. For my thoughts on these issues see Mitchell 2018; see also Deonna and Teroni 2015: 293-311, and Rossi and Tappolet 2018: 113-83.

being parsed into two personal level mental states, one of which is a predicative thought. To my knowledge, no such argument exists.

However, the critic might respond by homing in on the reference to conceptual capacities. (P5) claims that if the emotional experience involves conscious acts of predication (P4 being true), then a condition on the relevant aspectual experience is that the subject possesses the relevant concepts (e.g. *dangerous*, *fearsome*, *beautiful*). We have just argued that (P4) can be resisted by rejecting (P3): the relevant model for aspectual experience need not be an understanding of ‘seeing as’ as involving two components, one of which is a predicative thought. So, ostensibly we are not drawn to (P5) either. Yet, if aspectual experience necessarily involves conceptual (re)identificatory capacities, and the best model for understanding how such capacities figure at the personal level is along the lines of concepts of properties (perhaps understood along Fregean lines as inferentially relevant constituents of contents) being deployed in acts of active predication, then we are forced back to (P4). So, the critic might insist we still run afoul of the anti-doxastic and anti-conceptual intuitions.

Given this roundabout way of blocking the appeal to a less demanding notion of aspectual experience, the defender of the WPC view of emotional content needs to further clarify the relevant conceptual constraint on aspectual experience to avoid being pushed back into positing conscious acts of active predication. In the next sub-section, I suggest that they can do so by distinguishing between different kinds of conceptual capacities.

Before that, consider the following alternative. Perhaps the best way to respond is to claim that the relevant aspectual experience is *non-conceptual*, and so give up any conceptual constraint. However, appeals to non-conceptual content are contentious. If all this signals is the distinction between the manifest content of experience and the (usually) symbolically mediated, discursive content of the traditional (doxastic) propositional attitudes (e.g. judgment and belief),³⁰ then emotional content (on a WPC view) may turn out to be non-conceptual in this uncontroversial sense. However, we have not progressed in the argument. Under pressure from the critic, we need to show how this distinction can be applied in the case of a WPC view of emotional content. Doing this requires more than merely stipulating a notion of non-conceptual content which assumes the applicability of the distinction in this case.

³⁰ This seems the primary motivation Christine Tappolet has in claiming that emotions have non-conceptual content (see Tappolet 2016: Ch.1).

Further to this, conceptualists can agree that there is a phenomenological difference between the manifest content of lived experience and the discursive content of judgements, in terms of the way properties are represented. For example, consider the difference between fine-grained phenomenal-yellow as it figures in a visual experience of a particular object as instantiating that colour, and YELLOW, the symbolically mediated predicate, as it figures in the judgement ‘O is YELLOW’ (as the inferentially relevant constituent of that content). According to some philosophers, it still makes sense to claim that the visual experience has conceptual content. This is because the conceptual capacities implicated in judgement, involving symbolically mediated predicates, may not exhaust the range of conceptual capacities that either are or can be in play in non-doxastic experience. What is, therefore required to justify talk of non-conceptual content (in a more demanding sense) is an argument to the effect that, for example, phenomenal-yellow as it figures in a visual experience does not involve the deployment of conceptual capacities *per se*.³¹ Rather than pursue issues of non-conceptual content, the alternative route is to provide an account of aspectual experience which clarifies the relevant conceptual constraint, showing how it can be applied to emotional experience without running afoul of the relevant intuitions.

3.4 *Aspectual experience and passive predication*

Let me first say something about *doxastic* conceptual sophistication and the kind of predication this involves, keeping in mind that what follows is intended as a rough characterization.³² Doxastic conceptual sophistication is (or involves) the ability to actively predicate properties of objects in acts of (more or less) explicit conscious judgement or thought by the use of concepts (perhaps along with other relevant concepts, e.g. indexicals). The relevant concepts are *general concepts* in the sense that they meet Gareth Evans’ Generality Constraint in the following way: for a subject to meet the possession conditions for a general concept they must have the ability to re-combine the candidate concept in an indefinite range of linguistically specifiable propositions which

³¹ See McDowell 1994 (cf. Peacocke 2001: 239-64).

³² A full account of the nature of predicative thought and its conceptual structure would require a separate paper. Note that the kind of conceptual sophistication outlined might involve *mere entertaining*, and so not explicit assent in the form of judgement. In such cases, we might talk of *quasi-doxastic* conceptual sophistication insofar as the mode of entertaining does not involve a commitment to the relevant content as in paradigmatic doxastic attitudes.

they would understand. For example, if I possess the concept ‘fearsome’ there should be no cognitive barrier to me both entertaining and understanding an indefinite number of propositions where ‘fearsome’ figures in the predicate position (e.g. ‘a is fearsome, b is fearsome, c is fearsome’), as the inferentially relevant constituent of that content.³³

Tyler Burge makes a similar point. He claims the scope of attributives in propositional thought can function outside of what he calls ‘context-bounded identificational or other noun-like referential structures’ to which perceptual attributives are necessarily limited (i.e., attributives in propositional thought at least have the possibility of being applied in a context-independent way).³⁴ So there is a kind of conceptual sophistication, the *doxastic* kind, which involves concepts being deployed in conscious acts of predication, as a kind of active predication. Talk of ‘acts of predication’ is reminiscent of cognitive realist views, which explain what it is for a proposition to figure as the content of an intentional state in terms of cognitive act types.³⁵

Less demandingly, we might think there are also *non-doxastic* conceptual capacities, as non-thought involving, (re)identificatory capacities. These are the kinds of conceptual capacities which some conceptualists claim are passively drawn into operation in experience.³⁶ Insofar as we make this distinction between levels of conceptual sophistication, then the conceptual capacities drawn into operation in aspectual experience, and relatedly the kind of predication this involves, should be different from that which is involved in the traditional propositional attitudes, which deploy doxastic conceptual capacities (even if the two stand in an important relation; see below). What we are homing in on is a kind of *passive predication*, where intentional experience can be described as ‘carving out’ the relevant portion of the environment as being ‘thus and so’ (what follows is not a full account of passive predication; here I sketch the phenomenon).

In different terms, Sydney Shoemaker says, in the perceptual case, ‘if I see something, it looks somehow to me’,³⁷ and Fred Dretske writes that ‘in a certain sense, D must look

³³ Evans 1982: 100-5.

³⁴ Burge 2010: 40-41.

³⁵ See Hanks 2015; Soames 2015. If one accepts that emotional experiences are *non-doxastic* states, then it is difficult to see how such a view could be extended to them. The result would be that emotions are reduced to, or otherwise explained in terms of, the tokening of certain kinds of beliefs and judgements, along with relevant non-intentional feelings (see, e.g. Brigham 2017: 500).

³⁶ See McDowell 1994: 22.

³⁷ Shoemaker 1975: 299.

some way to S... in order for S to see D'.³⁸ And finally, as Alex Grzankowski's puts it, 'it's hard to see what could be more fundamental to representing propositionally that representing things as being some way.'³⁹ All these authors are homing in on passive predication, where the condition articulated is that insofar as an object is presented in experience it must *seem*, in the phenomenal sense of seems, 'some way' or 'somehow'. Note, talk of 'predication' remains apt insofar as the aspectual experience, in one non-literal way of putting it, says that something is a certain way. Indeed, it must do so on pain of not presenting its object under any aspect. But it does so in a way that need be no more cognitively demanding than the sense in which a visual perceptual experience of a coloured-object, for example, is passively predicative, and so 'says' (again in a non-literal sense) that the table is brown.

The distinction is also reflected in the phenomenological difference between a particular object *seeming to be* a certain way, and *judging that* it is a certain way. On the view being developed here, both arguably involve conceptual capacities, but the former are non-doxastic and the latter doxastic, and this is reflected in the different kinds of predication they involve; the former involves the merely passive predication of aspectual experience, whereas the latter involves the active predication of conscious thought, judgement, and belief.⁴⁰ Note, the passivity vs activity distinction being employed here is not to do with how we come to have the relevant mental states – the majority of our beliefs are, indeed, passively *acquired*. Instead, it has to do with the nature of the predication involved in those mental states. Of course, if someone prefers a different term than passive predication that is fine, as long as the phenomenological differences, and the difference in levels of conceptual sophistication, are kept in mind.

If we accept these distinctions, then the defender of the WPC view of emotional content has the means to block the critic's route from (i) aspectual experience involving some minimal conceptual constraint to (ii) its necessarily involving conscious acts of predication. The defender of that view can argue that the minimal conceptual constraint on enjoying an aspectual emotional experience is having the relevant evaluative

³⁸ Dretske 1969: 9.

³⁹ See Grzankowski *forthcoming*: 3.

⁴⁰ For a detailed account of the way concepts are applied to objects in predicative thought, see Burge 2009; and 2010: 39-67. Note the claim is not that the distinction between active and passive predication is the most fundamental distinction and difference between the level of judgement and that of experience, but rather that it is one central difference, which I am emphasizing for present purposes.

(re)identificatory capacity in play – *not* deploying the Evans-style general concepts. Insofar as this is the case the relevant kind of predication is passive evaluative predication. So, emotional experience having propositional content on the WPC view –the experience having a ‘something is some evaluative way’ or ‘evaluatively somehow’ content structure – is not to be equated with conscious acts of predication and the predicative content of judgements or thoughts. The fact that aspectual emotional experience involves minimal (re)identificatory conceptual capacities in this sense does not force one to say otherwise, once the relevant different senses of conceptual capacities, and the predication this involves, are clarified. The relevant conceptual sophistication implicated in aspectual emotional experience is therefore of a fundamentally non-doxastic sort, involving *passive evaluative predication*.⁴¹

Note, a stronger form of conceptualism about experience might claim that passive re-identification being rightly labelled conceptual is dependent on active concept-deployment being *available*, such that re-identification would necessarily involve a subject having the ability to think “this [seen now] is the same as that [seen previously]”, and thinking this involves active predication. Passive re-identification would have to be *poised* to feed into the relevant recognitional judgements.

However, even if one were to accept this condition, this concedes the point at issue since we are dealing with two strongly related but distinct capacities or abilities, and we should not conflate the capacities themselves with what they enable. First, there is the experientially-grounded, phenomenologically salient capacity to ‘recognize as the same’ or ‘recognize X as being *some way*’, and then there is the separate, but arguably importantly related, ability to deploy such a ‘carving out *as the same*’ in thought. On this issue, one might argue that the constraint should be that the latter (doxastic) ability is only possible when one has the former (non-doxastic) ability, but that the latter need *not* be possessed, or perhaps more concessively, need not be in any given instance exercised, in order to have the former (it is, after all, an *ability*).⁴²

⁴¹ Note, social constructionists in the neuroscience of emotion (see Russell and Barrett 2014 for an overview) often claim that some form of concept-possession is necessary for emotion. However, I take it that the kinds of concepts these authors discuss are closer to the Evans-style general concepts, as inferentially relevant *general terms*, than those minimal conceptual (re)identificatory capacities. I take it to be implausible, as the discussion suggests, that such *general terms* in any sense show up in emotional experience. Although this marks an interesting point of contact which warrants further discussion.

⁴² Of course, one might hasten to call the non-doxastic ability itself a recognitional capacity, preferring to maintain that what is sufficient for recognition is the non-doxastic ability combined with the ability to

However, even if the more demanding conceptualist claim is correct, we might adopt a less demanding notion of re-identification in the context of propositional content for certain cases. We could perhaps move to a notion of *responding in the same way to different instances* (which might motivate talk of *non-conceptual* propositional content in this specific sense) without any need to possess an ability to take up the relevant content in thought. These are complex issues about which more needs to be said, however, if the distinction between doxastic and non-doxastic conceptual capacities, and the types of predication involved, stands, that suffices for my purposes here.

Let me now take stock by returning to the intuitions. Given the above account, we can respect what is right about the *anti-doxastic* intuition in a way that does not undermine the WPC view of emotional content. We have also provided the means to see how the view can agree with part of the *anti-conceptual* intuition, which claims it is doubtful that human infants and (non-linguistic) non-human animals would meet the possession conditions for what are now understood as the Evans-style general concepts (those inferentially relevant constituents which would figure in the relevant propositional content). There is no overriding reason to think that in the relevant contexts, the minimal (re)identificatory capacities are to be identified with the deployment of any such general concept in the active predication of thought. Moreover, there is no reason to deny that creatures other than adult humans can possess such minimal (re)identificatory capacities (or something sufficiently similar to them).⁴³ On this view, an animal can be *afraid*, and its fear can represent the relevant particular object as *fearsome* – as evaluatively ‘some way’. As such, the animal’s emotional experience can ‘carve-out’ the relevant portion of the environment as being evaluatively ‘thus and so’, and so have propositional content on a WPC view. Yet it can do so without the animal possessing the doxastic conceptual sophistication to express this in conscious acts of predication, paradigmatically involving linguistic or symbolically mediated capacities. As Burge notes, we should avoid a simple conflation of propositional structure with linguistic structure, even if the latter is the most

judge that X is F at different times. However, this mainly seems an issue concerning how we use the term recognition, rather than a substantive point concerning the nature of, and distinctions between, the capacities and abilities involved.

⁴³ A different way of meeting that intuition would be to deny that the affective experiences of animals can have propositional contents even in the WPC sense; one might say that they have ‘mere affects’, but these are different from emotions.

‘impressive expression of propositional structure’.⁴⁴ Finally, the idea of passive predication gives the lie to the *anti-descriptive* intuition. Insofar as active predication (in experience) involves descriptively ‘reading off’ features of the world, then insofar as aspectual emotional experience only involves passive predication, then it doesn’t involve this. So, on the preceding analysis, the WPC view of emotional content can respect what is right about the intuitions, while maintaining that such content is a kind of propositional content.

4. Purely Objectual Emotional Experiences

Defenders of non-propositionalism about emotional content need examples of emotional experiences which fail to satisfy the WPC view. Given this, they have two routes, expressed in the following theses:

Objectual thesis (OT): There are emotional experiences that are directed toward (particular) objects, but not under aspects or modes of presentation (hereafter purely-objectual emotions).

Property thesis (PT): There are emotional experiences that are directed toward unbound properties, which do not qualify any particular object (hereafter purely-property emotions).

In answer to the question ‘do emotional experiences have exclusively propositional content’ the OT, and PT answer in the negative: emotional experiences *sometimes* have non-propositional content. In this final section, I focus on the OT.

First, though, consider that the PT involves denying the emotions are directed at particular objects. Given we accept that emotions have this minimal intentionality, then the PT will be a non-starter. Further, it is difficult to formulate examples of purely-property emotions. So even if there are unbound properties, which figure as the content of some intentional states,⁴⁵ it is difficult to see how emotional experiences could admit of this characterization.

⁴⁴ See Burge 2010:52. Although Burge develops a notion of propositional representational content that is significantly more complex than the WPC view, which seems closer to the *strong propositional content* view mentioned in 1.2.

⁴⁵ See fn.4.

4.1 *The objectual thesis*

Arguably one kind of emotional experience which supports the OT are those singularly directed at persons. We should understand persons in the everyday sense, as referring to individuals to whom both physical and mental predicates apply in our judgements. The candidate example of a purely-objectual emotion can be formulated as ‘Bill loves Sally’.⁴⁶ However, as we saw in previous sections, this is ambiguous since it can be interpreted as reporting a disposition. Love and hate construed dispositionally, or as non-occurrent emotional attitudes, may be (irreducibly) objectual attitudes. However, my concern is whether emotional *experiences* have a content which is propositional, on a WPC view. So, to be a candidate example for the OT, we need to formulate it as follows:

OT candidate emotion: an occurrent experience of love for O (assuming that there are such experiences).⁴⁷

The defender of the OT needs it to be true that my emotional experience does not represent O under any aspect or mode of presentation – there need be no passive predication – but rather is singularly directed upon its object, having ‘nothing to say’ about its properties.⁴⁸

The following reasoning supports this view. In the case of aspectual emotional experience, it makes sense to talk about correctness conditions. We can assess whether fear, for example, ‘gets it right’, because it represents its object as being a particular evaluative way – so providing the *full state of evaluative affairs* which sets the correctness conditions. It is, therefore, a legitimate question whether things are as they are represented as being. However, when it comes to an occurrent experience of love, it makes no sense to ask whether my love ‘gets things right’ in any epistemic sense. My feelings of love for O are not the kind of thing that can be evaluated in this way. As Grzankowski puts it, ‘there seems to be no sensible question of the form, ‘when is John’s

⁴⁶ Variations of this example are found in Crane 2007; 2009: 452-469; Montague 2007: 503-18; Grzankowski 2016a: 314-28; 2016b: 819-39; 2018: 134-151; *forthcoming*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Lyons 1980: 55, who claims that ‘love’ only has a dispositional usage. See Montague (2007: 511-15) for some logico-linguistic arguments in favour of love being an irreducibly objectual attitude in the dispositional sense.

⁴⁸ As Grzankowski (*forthcoming*, 2) puts it, ‘if there are mental representations that represent but do not represent that thing as being some way, then they fail to have propositional content’.

love accurate/satisfied/true”;⁴⁹ such epistemic talk is unintelligible in these contexts, and this is because this kind of emotional experience has purely-objectual, rather than propositional, content.⁵⁰ Note, in specific contexts, we may say feelings of love are prudentially or morally inappropriate.⁵¹ However, we are interested in the epistemic sense of appropriateness in terms of correctly representing the object as it is.

Before considering responses from the propositionalist about emotional content in the WPC sense (hereafter the propositionalist), note that what follows is *not* intended to be a theory of the experience of love, much less of love in general. Neither myself nor the non-propositionalists who use love as an example offer that. Instead, love is used as a candidate case, given its putatively purely-objectual character.

Now, one might claim that there is an evaluative property that feelings of love for O represent O as having, namely being *loveable*. Likewise, feelings of hate for O represent O as having the property *hateable*. The idea is not, however, that Bill has to love Sally in virtue of some specific property she has, but rather that an experience of love necessarily qualifies its particular object under a ‘loving’ aspect. However, the defender of the OT can claim this begs the question. We need more detailed considerations for why we should take this view as even *prima facie* plausible. In what follows, I set out these considerations, including responses. Note though, the defender of the OT can concede that I may enjoy other (non-loving) representations concerning Sally, and that these have a content which is best made sense of in terms of the WPC view. The contention is that in the case of the specifically *loving representation* of Sally that we have a case of a purely-objectual experience.

Let’s begin by noting (again) that many emotion theorists claim that emotional experiences are essentially evaluative phenomena. How this is cashed out is contentious, with competing theories suggesting different accounts.⁵² One widely-accepted thought, however, is that emotional experiences are paradigmatically intelligible in a first-person way. The idea, roughly, is that emotional experiences make sense to us, when we have them, in virtue of a connection to evaluative properties. This is often phrased as follows: it *makes sense* to be afraid of the fearsome, admiring of the admirable, and so on. These

⁴⁹ See Grzankowski 2016: 318 (see also *forthcoming*: 3).

⁵⁰ Remember Grzankowski (2016a: 316) claims that the key difference between intentional states with propositional and non-propositional content is the having or lacking of accuracy conditions.

⁵¹ See Tappolet 2016: Ch.3 for an overview of these different senses of appropriateness.

⁵² See fn.31.

considerations generate an intelligibility constraint.⁵³ The propositionalist can straightforwardly respect this constraint given that emotional experiences as claimed to represent their objects under evaluative aspects – my love is intelligible insofar as that experience involves a representation of a *loveable* object (it makes sense in those terms). However, it is not clear how the OT can. Remember on the OT, feelings of love for O have ‘nothing to say’ about the properties of O.

Reflecting this problem, consider the following example. We are told that Bill now has feelings of hate for Sally – another putative candidate of a purely-objectual emotion. He has had a change of heart. Given the OT, however, such a change in emotional attitude would not make sense from the first-person perspective in terms of represented properties of the object of the experience, or indeed any change thereof, since there were none represented to begin with. The change in emotional attitude would, therefore, be unintelligible in that sense.

Failure to meet the intelligibility constraint in this way would be reflected in the fact that Bill could not have any reasons available to him from the first-person perspective to which he could appeal for his change in attitude – it would be seem like a ‘brute’ unintelligible switch. Contrastingly, consider the following reason-based response to the following question: ‘why did you stop loving her and start hating her?’ Response: ‘because she no longer seemed loveable...I came to despise her’. The first-person intelligibility of this explanation is premised on two things. Firstly, that the loving emotion originally represented the person *as loveable* (or some related evaluative property). And secondly, that the subsequent ‘hating’ emotion represented the person as lacking this property (and taking on new ones). In this sense, the reasons we give for having the affectionate feelings we do, as reflecting our emotional experiences being intelligible responses in the first-personal sense, is premised on a reference to evaluative (or evaluatively-relevant) properties as properties of the object. Absent such an aspectual dimension, the emotional experience ceases to be intelligible in the relevant sense.

In response, the defender of the OT could jettison the intelligibility constraint so framed, claiming purely-objectual emotions need not meet it. But this runs afoul of common-sense and phenomenology. Naively our feelings of love and hate make sense to us in the first-person. The propositionalist has an explanation of why this is so. Contrastingly, the defender of the OT looks to be pushing the counter-intuitive view.

⁵³ See Wiggins 1998: 108, 199 Teroni 2007: 395-415; Poellner 2016: 1-28; Goldie 2002: 22-3.

The defender of the OT might, however, react as follows. Perhaps certain instances of ‘feelings of love’ can be framed in terms of aspectual emotional experience, and in such cases, the relevant aspect might be *loveable* (or *adorable*, or *caring* etc.). However, this is not plausible for all such experiences and remember, for non-propositionalism about emotional content to be true one convincing non-propositional candidate suffices. In fact, it over-intellectualizes certain emotional experiences to claim that the subject necessarily has to be (phenomenally) aware of specific properties, in virtue of which the emotional experience would first-personally make sense, and to which they could appeal in reason-giving contexts. Further to this, it is a feature of the kinds of contexts which putatively involve purely-objectual emotions, that subjects often say things like ‘I feel like I hate her, but I don’t know why’ or ‘I don’t know why I love him, I just feel I do’. What such statements indicate is that purely-objectual emotions need not be intelligible as framed by the intelligibility constraint. The propositionalist should take seriously these kinds of statements as pointing to a genuine phenomenon. What is required is a different interpretation, compatible with the view that the content of emotional experience is propositional.

First, note that it is plausible that the thick evaluative properties which figure at the level of intentional content in emotional experience, on the WPC view, are higher-level properties whose instantiation depends on the presence of specific conjunctions of lower-level basal properties, where the relation would be some form of supervenience. Evaluative properties like the beautiful, disgusting, and fearsome – and in our case the loveable or adorable – are rarely (if ever) instantiated *simpliciter*, but rather stand in supervenience relations to conjunctive co-instantiations of non-evaluative features of the relevant particular objects. Nonetheless, this does not mean that in *all cases* one need be consciously aware of all the relevant subtending non-evaluative properties (and their conjunctive co-instantiation) on which the evaluative property supervenes to be aware of the relevant evaluative property. Naturally, there has to be personal level awareness of some lower-level, subtending properties. For example, I cannot be aware of the music’s beauty without awareness of the notes being played. Nonetheless, the phenomenology of emotional experience suggests that I can be consciously aware of an evaluative property, as qualifying a particular object, without a corresponding personal level awareness of the specific, *complex conjunction* of subtending properties on which it is resultant in a particular instance.

Applying these points to cases of experiential love, which find expression in statements like ‘I feel like I love her, but I don’t know why’ we can say the following. In such cases, the subject is consciously aware of the (apparent) loveable quality of the individual, without being consciously aware of what natural properties prompt this; or, more precisely, which non-evaluative properties the value supervenes on. There is, therefore, an indeterminacy in such contexts, given the individual is *not sure* or is ‘blind’ as to why the person should seem this *loveable* way. The subject lacks a theoretical understanding of why the object of their experience has the value it seems to have, where this amounts to (lacking) knowledge of the relevant non-evaluative properties on which the higher-order evaluative property supervenes. Further to this, positing an indeterminacy in this way explains the diminished intelligibility. The reason such emotional experiences may make less sense than paradigmatic aspectual emotional experiences is not that the object fails to be represented under any aspect at all, but because the reasons why this object instantiates that value are experientially opaque to the subject. So, *pace* the OT, we are not forced into positing purely-objectual emotional experiences in such cases.⁵⁴

As a final move, the defender of the OT might circle back to the lack of correctness conditions. Given the tight connection between aspectual experience and correctness conditions, the propositionalist about emotional content is committed to saying feelings of love can be (non)veridical – they can get things (more or less) epistemically right. And this places an over-demanding epistemic constraint on such feelings. So, other considerations non-withstanding, we still do best to construe such cases as purely-objectual emotions to avoid epistemic over-demandingness.

However, the claim that feelings of love can be more or less epistemically right, in a way we can to some extent determine, is not as odd as it seems. Certain objects may be more or less epistemically appropriate objects of love depending on evaluative (and evaluatively-relevant) characteristics they may or may not possess. People often lament ‘I was such a fool to love him/her’. On one reading, this reflects the way feelings of love were representationally sensitive to such features or properties (e.g., loveable, adorable, caring, or their evaluatively-related correlates). However, as it turned out, the person did

⁵⁴ Appealing to a generic value content to explain such contexts won't work, since the evaluative content needs to individuate the emotion type. But a generic positive value can't individuate love, such as to distinguish it from other kinds of interpersonal favouring. While addressing the topic differently, Montague similarly rules out that the content of love may be generic (see Montague 2007: 511).

not have these properties or did not have them to the required extent. And to say someone was not, as it turns out, worthy of our feelings of love or affection could be taken as signalling that they failed to meet the correctness conditions set by our feelings toward them – they were represented as being some evaluative way, and yet they turned out *not* to be that way. So, the relevant epistemic constraint need not be over-demanding – rather, it accords with a feature of our folk discourse about such cases.

Summing up, the propositionalist has substantive responses to the OT in the candidate case of occurrent feelings of love. It is arguably a necessary condition on having an emotional experience of love – that is occurrently being in the loving (or hating) emotional attitude towards a person – that the relevant experience represents that person as of value. The responses considered are strategies intended to support this position, which the propositionalist can use in arguing against the OT in general. While to definitively rule out the OT we would have to proceed case-by-case, there is good reason for supposing that propositionalism about emotional content (on a WPC view) can defend itself against the OT.

Conclusion

This paper has made the positive case for applying a WPC view of propositional content to emotional experience. As noted at the outset, propositionalism about emotional content is tentative; it only takes one convincing case of an emotional experience that has non-propositional content to undermine the view. However, on a WPC view, this will not be an easy task for the non-propositionalist. As such, until we have convincing examples of purely-objectual emotional experiences, we have reason to suppose that the content of emotional experience is a kind of propositional content.

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