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Citation for final published version:

Mitchell, Jonathan 2019. Pre-emotional value awareness and the content-priority view. *Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (277) , pp. 771-794. 10.1093/pq/pqz018

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqz018>

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# PRE-EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND THE CONTENT- PRIORITY VIEW

BY JONATHAN MITCHELL

*Much contemporary philosophy of emotion has been in broad agreement about the claim that emotional experiences have evaluative content. This paper assesses a relatively neglected alternative, which I call the content-priority view, according to which emotions are responses to a form of pre-emotional value awareness, as what we are aware of in having certain non-emotional evaluative states which are temporally prior to emotion. I argue that the central motivations of the view require a personal level conscious state of pre-emotional value awareness. However, consideration of extant suggestions for the relevant type of evaluative state shows them all to be problematic. As such, I conclude that at present we do not have a persuasive formulation of the content-priority view, and that to get one defenders of the view need to specify which version they are committed to and defend it against the criticisms raised.*

**Keywords:** Emotion, Value, Content; Feeling, Phenomenology, Response

## INTRODUCTION

One prominent idea in contemporary philosophy of emotion is the claim that emotional experiences, understood as intentional states, have evaluative content. Call this the evaluative content view. The idea, at its most minimal, is that emotional experiences in some sense represent evaluative properties such as the *fearsome*, *disgusting*, *admirable*, *shameful*, *pitiful*, *awesome*, as qualifying the particular objects of those experiences (e.g. physical particulars, persons, events, and states of affairs). Connected to this, emotional experiences might be thought to involve some (not necessarily factive) form of awareness of evaluative properties of their objects, or perhaps awareness *that* something putatively instantiates an evaluative property. Precisely how the evaluative content view feeds into distinct theories of emotional experience is more controversial. What is (in part) contested is the candidate for the relevant representational state which possesses the aforementioned evaluative content, with judgementalist, perceptualist and *sui generis* approaches specifying different evaluative states. The details of these views will not concern me here. Suffice it to say the evaluative content view has been a significant point of agreement among many emotion theorists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See evaluative judgement theorists (Nussbaum 2001, Solomon 1976), different perceptual theorists (Roberts 2003; Tappolet 2016: Chap 1; De Sousa 2002: 255; Johnston 2001: 181-214; Deonna 2006: 29-46; Poellner 2016: 1-28; Döring 2007: 363-94) and *sui generis* theories (Helm 2001; Teroni 2007: 395-415; Goldie 2000; Montague 2009: 171-92; Mitchell 2018b).

My aim in this paper is to assess a relatively neglected alternative. According to what I call the content-priority view, emotional experiences do *not* have evaluative content. Rather emotional experiences are responses to forms of *pre-emotional value awareness*, as what we are (or seem to be) aware of in having certain non-emotional evaluative states (where the latter are temporally prior to emotion). So, in the good cases, the view claims that emotions are responses to values that we are *in fact* aware of; alternatively, when the prior evaluative state falls short of this factive value-awareness they are responses to what we seem to be aware of (i.e. apparent values).

While the details of the content-priority view will concern us presently, I want to emphasize the following caveat. As I will be understanding the view it involves the conjunction of two claims: (1) emotional experience does not have evaluative content; (2) there is a pre-emotional state, which provides us with an awareness of value (or seeming thereof) to which emotional experience is a response, and it is this state that has the relevant evaluative content. This formulation, therefore, differs from a view according to which emotional experiences could be said to, in some sense, inherit their evaluative content from prior pre-emotional evaluative states which have the evaluative content originally. This would involve denying (1). Such a view could be framed as a *weaker* version of the content-priority view, however I do not comment on its plausibility here.<sup>2</sup> My focus is on the *stronger* content-priority view which combines (1) and (2). It is this version which is put forward as an alternative to the evaluative content view by its adherents.<sup>3</sup>

Further caveats are in order before the main discussion begins. Both the evaluative content and the content-priority views are often framed by their adherents as supporting a particular account of evaluative knowledge. As such, there is significant dispute concerning whether it is emotions, or a state of value-awareness prior to them, that grounds (or more strongly constitutes) awareness of evaluative facts. While this epistemic issue is important for both views, and the opposition between them, the discussion here takes a different tack by homing in on the relevant state of pre-emotional value awareness posited by the content-priority view. As I see it, if in attempting to clarify the nature of pre-emotional value awareness, and the relevant evaluative state it is based on, the content-priority view encounters significant problems, then its epistemology of value is likewise in trouble, but I don't explicitly address the latter issue.

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<sup>2</sup> See Dokic and Lemaire (2013: 227-47) for one such view (cf. Poellner 2016: 10-11).

<sup>3</sup> Different versions find expression in Kenny 1963: 193; Lyons 1980: Ch.3; de Sousa 1987: 122, and more recently Brady 2010: 126; Mulligan 2009; 141-61, 2010: 475-500; Müller 2017: 281-308. My interest in the view will be general in that I do not consider specific ways these theorists go on to develop an account what the relevant emotions are (e.g. bodily responses, attitudes toward objects, propositional attitudes).

Connected to the above, I do not discuss the role of the so-called ‘formal objects’ of emotions, which are typically thought to be evaluative predicates or properties in some sense correlated with distinct emotion types, and which figure in their conditions of fittingness (i.e. in good cases, when the ‘formal object’ is instantiated as qualifying the relevant particular object, awareness of it may constitute evaluative knowledge). Both the evaluative content and content-priority view can be considered ‘naively’, as concerning the representation of evaluative properties (as in the paragraphs above) without reference to ‘formal objects’, and since there is controversy over which emotion theory provides a correct understanding of emotions’ ‘formal objects’, this is best passed over in the present study.<sup>4</sup> Although, a minimal assumption that is important is to capture the opposition between the views is that the ‘evaluative property’ which figures in the content of the relevant prior evaluative state, on the content-priority view, is supposed to be the same as that which proponents of the evaluative content view claim figures in the content of emotion (hence the dispute over whether it is emotion or some prior state which constitutes an awareness of the value of x, or seeming thereof).

The roadmap is as follows. Section 1 determines the scope of the relevant ‘awareness of value’ posited by the content-priority view, arguing that in paradigmatic cases the view requires a personal level conscious state of explicit attention to value. Section 2 draws a distinction between doxastic and non-doxastic formulations of the view and provides reasons for rejecting the former. Section 3 considers two candidates for the non-doxastic pre-emotional evaluative state; namely, (a) an evaluative perception and (b) a *sui generis* value-feeling. I show that both encounter problems. Finally, section 4 examines whether recognizing the ‘phenomenology of response to value’ and ‘intelligibility of emotion’ means that some version of the view must be accepted. I argue that this is not the case since alternative interpretations of these aspects of emotion are available. The conclusion is that extant versions of the content-priority view are problematic, and so we do not, at present, have a persuasive formulation of the view.

## I. MOTIVATION AND THE SCOPE OF ‘AWARENESS’

The content-priority view is motivated by two central claims about emotion, of which it provides *prima facie* plausible explanations. The first is a *phenomenological* claim:

Phenomenology of Response to Value: It is a fundamental aspect of emotion that it is experienced as a response to matters of significance.

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion of formal objects in emotion theory, see Mulligan 2007: 1-24, Teroni 2007: 395-415; Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch.7; Muller 2017: 281-308.

The content-priority view has a plausible way of cashing this out. We experience emotions as responses to matters of significance because they fundamentally are (or involve) responses to forms of pre-emotional value awareness; they are responses to the evaluative standing of particular objects, where that evaluative standing is (at least seemingly) made salient on the basis of a temporally prior evaluative state. In this sense emotions are not merely caused but *motivated* by the evaluative standing of their particular objects.<sup>5</sup>

The second claim concerns emotions' intelligibility:

Intelligibility of emotion: emotions 'make sense' in reference to evaluative properties; it 'makes sense' to be afraid of the fearsome, admiring of the admirable, in awe of the awesome.

According to the content-priority view emotions make sense (when they do) because they are responses to a pre-emotional awareness of value. It makes sense to feel fear because the dog *already* seems (in a sense that will be clarified) fearsome. The relevant intelligibility is also plausibly first-personal: it 'makes sense' for Sally to feel fear because the dog already seems fearsome *to her*. So, according to the content-priority view, emotions are (to repeat) not merely caused by, but typically *intelligibly motivated* by the relevant value or apparent value. In other words, the pre-emotional evaluative states possess an evaluative content in the light of which it makes sense for the subject to respond as they do – as such, the pre-emotional evaluative state provides *motivating reasons* for the response.<sup>6</sup>

Defenders of the content-priority view appeal to further sources of support which we will come to in due course, however the two claims above, and the interpretations provided, are central. As we shall see below, they prove significant in determining the scope of 'awareness' in the purported pre-emotional awareness of value.

In a recent paper, Jean Moritz Müller (2017: 282) frames the view as follows: 'emotions are not ways of coming to be aware of value, but ways of acknowledging values of which we are already aware'. Given this formulation, two questions need answering. (1) What is the relevant pre-emotional *evaluative state* which serves as an awareness of value? (2) What type of *awareness* is the relevant awareness of value? Sections 2 and 3 consider question (1), here I focus on (2). So, for the moment we can remain non-committal on (1), and merely talk of pre-emotional evaluative states.

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<sup>5</sup> See Müller 2017: 286; Mulligan 2009; 141-61, 2010: 475-500.

<sup>6</sup> See Müller 2017: 288. Mulligan 2010: 475-500. Arguably the intelligibility under discussion here is conceptual (i.e. fear of a dog makes *conceptual* sense only as a response to apparent danger; see Kenny [1963]).

I now examine whether the content-priority view is committed to the claim that these pre-emotional evaluative states involve personal level, conscious awareness as of the relevant evaluative properties. Here is what Müller (*ibid.*: 290-1) says: ‘the awareness in question is to be distinguished from noticing or consciously registering value. After all, it is possible to have an emotion without noticing the value of the object at which it is directed’. Later, Müller (*ibid.* 290-1) emphasizes what looks to be a similar point; ‘it is possible to enjoy concern-based aspect perceptions and feelings of value [both candidates for the relevant evaluative state which I consider in section 3] without the conscious registering of value’. So, ostensibly the content-priority view is non-committal on whether the relevant pre-emotional evaluative states are states of personal level consciousness – conscious awareness of value is seemingly not a requirement of the view.<sup>7</sup>

However, this turns out to be problematic given the motivations considered at the start of this section. Let’s first get clear on some relevant distinctions. We can distinguish between personal level conscious states, for example, a perceptual experience as of a red apple, and non-conscious states, for example a subpersonal information processing state of the perceptual system which registers retinal stimulation. The idea of something being registered in consciousness pertains to personal level conscious states, which typically have a first-personal phenomenal character (there is *something-it-is-like* to undergo them). Contrastingly, there is good reason to think non-conscious states don’t have any phenomenology; for example, there is nothing it is like *per se* for my perceptual system to be sub-personally registering retinal stimulation. According to Müller, on the second quote, we need not take the relevant awareness of value posited by the content-priority view to be *conscious* awareness; it might just as well be a non-conscious awareness of value – for example, a subpersonal registering of value – as such, the relevant evaluative state is not necessarily conscious.

However, we might also draw a further distinction by reflecting on the idea of ‘noticing’, as signalling something like explicit conscious attention contrasted with something less explicit but nonetheless conscious.<sup>8</sup> As is familiar, our conscious experience outstrips that which we are attentively focusing on at any given instance. Consider the following example. Sitting in a chair typing I am attentively focused on writing an email, which is the object of explicit conscious attention. At the same time, I’m also aware of the pressure of my body against the chair. Yet when I’m settled into writing I don’t (at least most of the time) ‘notice’, that is, explicitly consciously attend to, the relevant kinaesthetic sensations. It would be odd,

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<sup>7</sup> See also de Sousa 1982: 122 on ‘implicit [evaluative] attributions’.

<sup>8</sup> In correspondence Müller assures me that by ‘registering in consciousness’ he means noticing, *as explicit* noticing where what is conscious in this case *is the registering*. However, the further distinction between types of ‘conscious registering’ in the text is nonetheless important to mapping out the space of possible views.

however, to construe such kinaesthetic sensations as only registered subpersonally. Rather they form part of an implicit phenomenological background awareness.

Given these distinctions, we have three possible readings with respect to the scope of awareness in the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state: (R1) explicit conscious attention to value (as ‘noticing’); (R2) implicit background consciousness of value; (R3) non-conscious, registering of value. Insofar as it is possible to have an emotion without *noticing* the value of the object at which it is directed, this leaves open options (R2) and (R3). Insofar as it is possible to have awareness of value without *some* registering in phenomenal consciousness, this only leaves open option (R3). In what follows I argue that to maintain plausible readings of the ‘Phenomenology of Response to Value’ and ‘Intelligibility of Emotion’ claims, as motivations for the content-priority view, (R1) has to be the paradigmatic case.

Let’s consider the phenomenology of response, which tells us, ‘it is a fundamental aspect of emotion that it is experienced as a response to matters of significance’. The content-priority view cannot plausibly claim that the best way of making sense of this is a view according to which the relevant pre-emotional evaluative states are typically non-conscious registrations of value (R3). No sense can be made of a phenomenology of response to something which is itself not phenomenally conscious. Insofar as I experience *myself* responding to something, then that something must in some sense figure in consciousness. Note, it is important not to confuse this with the stronger claim of saying that the content-priority view should be committed to emotional responses *necessarily* being preceded by a conscious awareness of value. There may be cases in which, for whatever reason, the relevant pre-emotional state is not consciously present. But whatever the independent motivation for positing nonconscious pre-emotional evaluative states in such cases, it can’t be anything to do with a phenomenology of response to value. So, if the view appeals to the phenomenology of response to value as a motivation it has to commit to the idea that paradigmatically the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state is *in some sense* one of conscious awareness.

What needs clarifying is the ‘in some sense’ phrase. This is ambiguous between (R1) and (R2). We need to ask whether it is plausible for the view to adopt the weaker position, holding that the scope of ‘conscious awareness’ necessitated by appeal to the phenomenology of response to value need only be ‘implicit background conscious awareness of value’ (R2), rather than explicit ‘noticing’ (R1).

As I see it, the content-priority view has to opt for (R1) to avoid misdescribing the phenomenology it appeals to. Remember, the idea is that the emotion is experienced as a response to *matters of significance*. For the relevant object to *seem significant*, so as to motivate an emotional response, I have to ‘notice’ its significance in a more demanding way than (R2) suggests, as more than an implicit background consciousness of value. Reflecting this, consider the oddness of someone pre-reflectively experiencing object-directed fear as a

response to a merely absent-minded background awareness of how dangerous the cliff edge was, for example. The fact that an emotional response of fear was precipitated strongly suggests that the relevant value was ‘noticed’, as qualifying the object of explicit conscious attention. Of course, things can be significant without us ‘noticing’ them in this way, and the value of what we notice may be indeterminate, vague, or even inscrutable from the first-person perspective. But this is beside the point. Talk of a phenomenology of response to value cannot in paradigmatic cases admit of an interpretation which appeals to merely a background awareness of value.

So, the appeal to the phenomenology of response to value requires that in paradigmatic cases the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state is one of personal level conscious awareness, as involving an explicit attention to the value of its object. This reflects what most emotion and value theorists would take to be independently plausible anyway; namely, that values (especially those represented in personal level affective experiences like emotions) are typically the kind of thing that capture attention.<sup>9</sup>

What about the intelligibility claim? It is clear that (R3), of awareness of value as non-conscious registering, is problematic. This is because of the first-personal dimension of the intelligibility in play. Consider the following statement: it ‘makes sense’ for Sally to *feel fear* because the dog is registered as fearsome by a pre-emotional subpersonal evaluative state. Surely, Sally’s fear cannot be first-personally intelligible in those terms. Insofar as Sally’s fear, as experienced, make sense to her (if it does), it would not plausibly do so in this way.

However, the content-priority view might respond that the relevant intelligibility need not be first-personal, but could be third-personal. For example, we can provide a third-personal story about Sally’s fear which need not require, or make any reference to, a *conscious* awareness of value. This is a possible move for the content-priority theorist to make, yet it is a problematic one. First, once we move to the third-personal level the content-priority view may lose any claim to be distinctly explanatory of the (third-personal) intelligibility of the emotional response. After all, we appeal to a wide range of states, dispositions, character traits, desires, beliefs, etc. to render third-personally intelligible why people emotionally respond as they do; the contention that they do so on the basis of a prior non-conscious evaluative state would be only one candidate among many. The view might respond that this overlooks a distinction between reasons explanations in terms of motivating reasons, and explanations in terms of *mere* ‘reasons why’ (or explanatory reasons). And it might be suggested explanations in terms dispositions, character traits, etc. are mere ‘reasons why’ whereas the prior non-conscious evaluative state posited by this version of the content-priority view provides access the relevant motivating reasons (i.e. the values). Perhaps this is a fair response with respect to

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<sup>9</sup> See Brady 2013 for discussion of the relation between emotion and attention.



dispositions and character traits (I am less sure about its applicability desires and beliefs), although more would need to be said about this issue; one might think that one's non-conscious emotional dispositions and character traits can develop in a way which track (evaluative) facts about the world, and so could also figure in explanations in terms of motivating reasons.

Perhaps more importantly than the above, the content-priority view, so construed, fails to sufficiently engage with a relevant explanandum, namely the first-person intelligibility of *many* of our emotional responses, and how that intelligibility is manifest in paradigmatic cases (namely, in terms of a *conscious* awareness of value). Of course, this is not to rule out in principle that in certain specific cases, as with certain therapy cases, there may first be a third-person explanation (say in terms of motivating reasons), that can, if made salient to the patient in the right way, contribute to a *kind of* first-person intelligibility with respect to their emotional responses.<sup>10</sup> However surely this is not the paradigmatic way out emotional experiences are first-personally intelligible to us (and we might worry about disanalogies between the kind of first-personal intelligibility which subjects might come to have in such cases from the everyday intelligibility of our emotional responses; see section 4 for more on this).

So, an (R3) interpretation of awareness of value in the context of intelligibility is problematic. If the content-priority view is to maintain talk of responses 'in the light of' values, and its readings of 'because-statements' in emotional reports,<sup>11</sup> then at least for paradigmatic cases some conscious awareness of value will be implicated.

We can (again) further clarify the 'some awareness' claim, in relation to (R1) and (R2). Would my emotional response be intelligible, in the first-person sense, as motivated by merely an implicit background consciousness of value, as distinct from explicit conscious attention to value? Matters are less clear here. However, intuitively a paradigmatic episode of fear would arguably not make as much sense to me in response to merely a background awareness of danger (whatever precisely that amounts to), compared with its being a response to an explicit 'noticing' of that which is dangerous. Contrastingly, the implicit background consciousness of value is more likely to give rise to, and intelligibly motivate, affective states with a more diffuse character than typical 'object-directed' emotions – that is emotions which target particular objects. Indeed, background awareness of danger is likely to intelligibly motivate generalized anxiety, rather than object-directed fear, and that is arguably the case even if the object that (apparently exemplifies) that danger is determinately apprehended by a different state of awareness. (R2) might, therefore, be a more appropriate reading of the value-awareness implicated in the intelligibility of affective states like moods. Given this, (R1) is arguably the clearest way for the content-priority view to maintain its reading of the

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<sup>10</sup> I thank Müller for suggesting this alternative.

<sup>11</sup> See again Müller 2017: 286; 289; Mulligan 2009; 141-61, 2010: 475-500 (see also section 4).

intelligibility claim as a central motivation, at least when considering typical (particular) object-directed emotions.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, the content-priority view is not being saddled with a commitment to an (R1) reading of the relevant value awareness in *all* cases of emotional response. Yet in those cases where (R2) or (R3) is a plausible reading of relevant awareness of value, it is at least doubtful whether we have (a) a phenomenology of response to value and/or (b) the relevant first-person sense of intelligibility. On this basis, the content-priority view should commit to the following claim: in paradigmatic cases of emotional response, the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state which serves to provide an ‘awareness of value’ is a conscious, personal level evaluative state, involving explicit attention to the evaluative standing of the relevant object. Talk of awareness of value should be taken as referring to this more precise specification from here on.

One might question, though, why making this explicit is important. First, note that the evaluative content view, which the content-priority view is offered as an alternative to, is predominantly understood as concerning the personal level content of emotional experience (as content had by a supposed conscious experience of value). To be dialectically engaged with the evaluative content view, the content-priority view needs to be couched at the same level of analysis. The content-priority view will not be an alternative to the evaluative content view if the posited pre-emotional evaluative states are paradigmatically non-conscious. The relevant content at issue needs to be personal level content, as manifest to the subjects of the relevant experiential states, and so as concerning *conscious* evaluative states.

Furthermore, given the above, the content-priority view will not be able to non-problematically appeal to appraisal theory in emotion psychology for support, or (as we shall see later) to clarify the relevant evaluative state (i.e. to specify the precise kind of state). On such views, the relevant appraisals are typically construed as (i) involving evaluations and (ii) emotion elicitors. So, at first glance appraisal theory and the content-priority view converge upon the same phenomena – namely, pre-emotional evaluative states which precipitate emotional responses. One problem though, given what has been said so far, is that on

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<sup>12</sup> Let me say something about moods which are in many respects similar to emotions while purportedly lacking the relevant form of object-directedness. For what it’s worth an analysis of moods can be given which respects their phenomenology – as being in relevant respects both similar and different from emotions – but which nonetheless construes them as having a distinctive kind of intentionality. However, regardless of the correctness of such a view, with respect to the content-priority view it seems to be problematic to claim that all *moods* are responses to pre-emotional evaluative states, without a proposal about how the relevant state would differ when precipitating a mood rather than an emotion. And further to this, one might question whether moods are necessarily intelligible (if they are) *because* of any such more general conscious awareness of value which may precede them (see Mitchell 2018a, for a different view of their intentionality and intelligibility of moods which is more in keeping with the evaluative content view of emotions).

standard views in emotion psychology the relevant appraisals, which are typically claimed to be causally responsible for emotion elicitation (as antecedents), are automatic and nonconscious (subpersonal) cognitive processing states.<sup>13</sup> So, even if it is claimed that the evaluative content possessed by the purported pre-emotional evaluative states is also that which figures in these subpersonal evaluative appraisals (and there are reasons to doubt this)<sup>14</sup> this is irrelevant. This relevant idea of an (evaluative) ‘appraisal’ is of a subpersonal psychological construct, not a personal level conscious state to which one intelligibly responds (as intelligibly motivating a personal level response), and so is of no help to the content-priority view for the same reasons that an (R3) interpretation of the relevant ‘awareness of value’ was found to be problematic.

## II. THE DOXASTIC CONTENT-PRIORITY VIEW

We are now in a position to specify the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state which serves as a conscious awareness of value. First though, we need to make an important distinction between two candidate types of state, which generates two different versions of the content-priority view. On the first view, the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state is *doxastic*, for example, a conscious evaluative judgement.<sup>15</sup> On the second view, the pre-emotional evaluative state is *non-doxastic*, for example, a conscious evaluative perception or *sui generis* value-feeling. In this section, I consider the doxastic version.

A first criticism goes as follows. Insofar as the relevant pre-emotional state is an evaluative judgement then the way evaluative properties figure in those judgements will be as evaluative concepts, as predicates applied to the relevant particular objects (e.g. ‘awareness that the dog is *fearsome*’). But given the content-priority view claims emotions are responses to pre-emotional awareness of value, then to be able to respond with fear, to the awareness *that* something is *fearsome*, one needs to possess that evaluative concept. In different terms, if one didn’t have the relevant evaluative concept, one couldn’t make the evaluative judgement (since it constitutes part of the judgement). But the view has, therefore, set the bar for being in a position to have the relevant emotional response too high. This is because it is implausible

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<sup>13</sup> See Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991 (cf. Arnold 1960 who might be a borderline case on this issue). Note if the relevant appraisals are said to constitute emotional experience, rather than a pre-emotional state, then they won’t help to the content-priority view (see Frijda 2007: Ch.4 and Ellsworth and Scherer 2003: 572-95).

<sup>14</sup> See Frijda 1992: 257-87, who argues that the relevant appraisal dimensions are of an ‘elementary kind’, representing primitive subject-environment relations. Although Moritz 2018: 525-40 sketches a notion of emotions’ formal objects as involving ‘concern-(in)congruence’ which has certain similarities with Frijda’s view.

<sup>15</sup> Kenny 1963: 193 and Lyons 1980: Ch.3 come closest to this view.

that some non-human animals and human infants possess the necessary conceptual sophistication.

Let me develop this point. The relevant conceptual sophistication mentioned at the end of the last paragraph is *doxastic*; it is the ability to predicate evaluative properties of objects in acts of (more or less) explicit conscious judgement by the use of evaluative concepts (along with other relevant concepts, e.g. first-person indexicals). As such the relevant evaluative concepts are general concepts in the sense that they should 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 propositions which 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').<sup>16</sup> This 'active' doxastic conceptual sophistication can be distinguished from the kinds of 'passive' (or non-doxastic) conceptual capacities, as identificatory or recognitional capacities, which some conceptualists claim are drawn into operation in experience.<sup>17</sup>

Given the above, it is not open to the doxastic content-priority view to respond that those to whom we intuitively don't ascribe the relevant doxastic conceptual sophistication possess conceptual capacities in a less demanding sense. That could be true but is irrelevant. Given that the pre-emotional evaluative states are conscious evaluative judgements then the conceptual sophistication in question is necessarily an 'active' doxastic sort, and it is this kind of conceptual sophistication (reflected in the Generality Constraint) that isn't plausibly attributable to non-human animals and human infants who nevertheless plausibly enjoy a wide range of emotional responses. Importantly, the critic need not rule out that the relevant (causal) motivation sometimes runs in this direction - making a judgement about the fearsomeness of a particular object, may intelligibly motivate fear in most adult humans (given satisfaction of the relevant background conditions). Rather, the criticism undermines the claim that this picture is plausible as a general account.

Related to the above, the doxastic content-priority view limits our capacity for experiencing new and unfamiliar emotions for which we do not possess the relevant evaluative concepts. Consider the following case. Mary is a computer scientist who is locked in a grey room from birth with only a small number of functional-objects (e.g. a bed, food) which allow her to subsist. She is then, on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, airlifted to the grand-canyon. She is emotionally moved by the natural splendor of the visual spectacle set out before her, something she could never have imagined in her grey functional room. She is overcome with

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<sup>16</sup> See Evans 1982: 100-5.

<sup>17</sup> See McDowell 1994: 22.

awe, as an emotional response. Surely this emotional response will strike her as entirely new and unfamiliar. Yet, if the doxastic content-priority view is right, then to have the emotional response (of awe) she needs to make the pre-emotional evaluative judgement that what she is visually presented with is *awesome*. But, *ex hypothesi*, she has no prior familiarity (even in imagination) with the relevant evaluative properties and predicates, and so does not have the means to make the necessary judgement. Generalizing, the doxastic content-priority view arguably makes the repertoire of our emotional responses co-extensive with the repertoire of our evaluative concepts. Not only does this raise further issues about how we come to possess the concepts implicated in these evaluative judgements in the first place, but severely limits our capacity for experiencing new and unfamiliar emotions.

A final criticism appeals to the idea that some of our emotional responses have the character of ‘quick fire’ responses, for example, fright, surprise, and startle.<sup>18</sup> Reflection on what it is like to be startled, say when someone jumps in front of you from behind a door, suggests an immediacy that doesn’t admit of the temporal succession of response to judgment which the view requires. Perhaps the view will respond that cases such as surprise and startle are not relevant, since it is contentious whether these should count as emotional responses (rather than say mere affect programs), and arguably they are not paradigmatic. Nevertheless, consider the following case of disgust. Pauline is absent-mindedly walking down by the canal, thinking about nothing in particular. Suddenly a rat darts out in front of her and she ‘shudders’, recoiling in disgust. The doxastic content-priority view has it that interceding between the emotional response and the prior non-emotional ‘carefree’ state, is a pre-emotional evaluative judgement with the content ‘that rat is disgusting’ (or something approximating this). Yet this gets the phenomenology wrong: the instantaneous character of the disgust response seems too ‘quick fire’ to involve a temporally prior evaluative judgement.

Given the criticisms of this section, doxastic versions of the content-priority view are implausible.

### III. THE NON-DOXASTIC CONTENT-PRIORITY VIEW

An alternative to the doxastic proposal is to specify the relevant pre-emotional conscious evaluative state as non-doxastic. The central examples discussed in the literature are evaluative perceptions and *sui generis* value-feelings. Section 3.1 considers evaluative perceptions, and 3.2 considers the *sui generis* proposal.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This criticism applies to all versions of the content-priority view, but it is particularly salient for the doxastic version.

<sup>19</sup> Another option would be evaluative intuitions. However, the most detailed accounts in the contemporary literature of evaluative intuitions, which connect them to emotions, either take the them to be forms of emotion (Roeser 2011) or to be constituted by emotions (see Kaupinnen 2013: 360-81). Mulligan frames the

### 3.1 Evaluative Perceptions

Let's start by looking at the suggestion that emotional responses are temporally preceded by pre-emotional evaluative perceptions. Remembering that the content-priority view should be a view about conscious evaluative states, the relevant perceptions would be perceptual experiences. More specifically they would be perceptual experiences as of the value of the particular objects of emotions. On this view, an emotion of fear, say, is a response to a pre-emotional evaluative perceptual experience of its object *as fearsome*.

An important criterion of plausibility for non-doxastic views is that the relevant evaluative state has a phenomenology which is, at least paradigmatically, discernible from emotional phenomenology.<sup>20</sup> Put otherwise, it should not be the case that the only phenomenology which is discernible in connection with the relevant conscious awareness of value is *the phenomenology of emotion* – the relevant pre-emotional state is, after all, supposed to be temporally prior to emotion. Noting this, it is troubling for the view that there is a significant strand of contemporary philosophy of emotion which thinks of emotional experience itself as having a perceptual or perception-like phenomenology. According to such views, emotional experiences involve perceptual experiences as of evaluative properties, as seeming to qualify particular objects in the subject's environment. Fear, for example, involves a perceptual experience of its particular object as fearsome; likewise, disgust involves a perceptual experience of its particular object as disgusting.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of whether this form of Perceptualism is ultimately plausible, consideration of it gives rise to the following point: it has seemed to many emotion theorists that if there is a perceptual or perception-like evaluative phenomenology in the vicinity of emotional experience it is one that is constitutive of emotion, rather than a state prior to it. Perceptual versions of the non-doxastic content-priority view must deny that claim (and the evaluative content view that comes along with it), but consideration of this point brings into focus the search for a *non-emotional* evaluative perceptual phenomenology.

It has been suggested that the relevant form of non-emotional awareness of value – to which emotions are (putatively) a response – is a form of aspectual perceptual experience

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notion of 'being struck by value' – a form of (non-doxastic) value intuitionism – in terms of non-emotional *sui generis* value-feelings (Mulligan 2009: 158). So, non-emotional, non-doxastic evaluative intuitions, for content-priority view, turn out to be another name for the *sui generis* proposal (see section 3.2).

<sup>20</sup> Of course, in certain cases, mental states be distinct without being phenomenologically discernible. For example, jealousy may not be phenomenologically discernible from hatred, even though they are different states.

<sup>21</sup> See Tappolet 2016: Chap 1; de Sousa 2002: 255; Johnston 2001: 181-214; Deonna 2006: 29-46; Döring 2007: 363-94.

(seeing under an aspect), as constituted by the subject's cares and concerns.<sup>22</sup> Consider the following cases, amended from Charles Starkey (2008: 425-54) and Peter Goldie (2002: 235-54). Standing at the traffic lights on the street, I am looking both ways, deciding when to cross. Just as I am about to cross a car approaches in the distance. I wait until it has passed, then safely walk to the other side. It is plausible that my perceptual experience, in this case, involves a concern for personal well-being, or safety, or some such relevant 'concern'. Consider the next case. An experienced pilot is captaining a plane. As the plane begins its final descent phase so as to land on the runway, the pilot looks to see if the runway is clear, checks the speed and angle of descent, and makes minor adjustments so as to land safely. Again, it is plausible that the perceptual experience of the runway involves a concern for well-being, or safety, or some such relevant 'concern'. Clearly, these examples are (a) non-emotional, and (b) point to a ubiquitous phenomenon.

However, do these examples support the plausibility of a pre-emotional perceptual experience as of value? Not obviously. While the relevant 'concerns' in some sense inform a 'perceptual assessment' of the situation – one would not typically be perceptually attending to potential obstacles on the runway *unless* one was concerned about landing safely – the relevant concerns seem more like dispositions or (counter-factual supporting) background conditions for being engaged in the activity in the particular way one is, rather than part of the intentional content, in the sense of qualifying the particular objects of the perceptual experience. Concern for well-being or safety, in some broad sense, is not plausibly itself perceptually experienced. However, perhaps one might respond by saying in these cases one is 'looking with an eye to safety', and so there is a sense in which 'safety' as a concern, if not well-being *per se*, enters into the content of perceptual experience – plausibly things can look more or less safe.

Nevertheless, is this evaluative content of the kind that is typically thought to relate to emotions or emotional responses? And what emotion would be rendered an intelligible response specifically in virtue of a prior non-emotional state having such content? The problem might be put by saying that 'concern-content' – if we can talk in these terms of concerns entering into the content of perceptual experience – is not the same as, and certainly not co-extensive with evaluative content. Once this is granted however it appears that in specifying a phenomenologically discernible, non-emotional, form of evaluative perceptual experience the content-priority view has cast the net too wide. Plausibly the majority of perceptual experience includes Gibsonian-style affordances, which in some sense embed our concerns and cares, and aspects of which (especially actions and action-tendencies) are generally rendered intelligible in terms of such concerns and cares. Yet even if it is granted

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<sup>22</sup> See Müller 2017: 293.

that there is such a thing as ‘concern-content’ in perceptual experience the relevant aspectual perceptions seem *too ubiquitous* to mark off a distinct kind of non-emotional evaluative perception with the required emotionally relevant evaluative content. Phenomenological discernibility has, therefore, come at the cost of losing the connection to emotion.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the flipside of this problem is that once the ‘cares’ and ‘concerns’ are specified more narrowly, as co-extensive with the kind of evaluative content required (e.g. as ‘serious concerns’ or ‘core relational themes’, such as danger, threat, losses and other relevant issues of concern), then it becomes more difficult to substantiate phenomenological discernibility. To see this, consider one of the examples again, but modified with the relevant evaluative content clearly in play. Standing at the traffic lights on the street, I am looking both ways, deciding when to cross. Just as I am about to cross a fast car approaches and swerves towards me. I instinctively jump out of the way, making a narrow escape. ‘It was terrifying!’ I say to my partner that evening when recounting the event. Plausibly, one might argue that there is some perceptual or perception-like experience as of the *danger* or *fearsomeness* of the situation. But is such a perception temporally prior to, and phenomenologically discernible from, my emotional response? It certainly does not seem obvious that there was a perfectly calm, non-emotional perception of danger or fearsomeness, and then an emotional response to such a putative non-doxastic awareness of value.

Importantly what this modified example emphasizes is that it is not clear we have phenomenological discernibility once the relevant evaluative content is in play. Note, phenomenological discernibility will not be guaranteed just by claiming that the relevant pre-emotional perceptions are *non-valenced* whereas emotions are valenced. What is precisely meant by ‘valence’ would need spelling out, and again when the relevant ‘cares’ and ‘concerns’ are specified more narrowly, as plausibly capturing the emotionally relevant evaluative content in play, then it becomes more difficult to see how the relevant perception would not be in some sense valenced, as positive or negative (see section 3.2 for more discussion of this issue). In light of this discussion, this version of the non-doxastic content-priority view looks problematic.

### 3.2 *Sui Generis Value Awareness*

An alternative version of the non-doxastic view appeals to a *sui generis* pre-emotional evaluative seeming state – a so-called value-feeling. Müller (2017: 293) talks in this context of pre-emotional construals which he claims ‘afford a primitive type of acquaintance with value...as

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Muller 2018: 525-40 for a different view of how concerns relate to the content of the relevant evaluative state.



a *sui generis* form of non-propositional awareness'.<sup>24</sup> Note, talking of value-*feelings*, and being non-emotionally 'struck by value', as Kevin Mulligan (2009; 2010) does, is personal level phenomenological language, couched at the level of conscious states. So, the *sui generis* view can't plausibly be construed as anything other than a proposal concerning phenomenally conscious states.

A first criticism of this proposal is that the view is apt to seem ad hoc.<sup>25</sup> So far, we have seen that two prime candidates for the relevant pre-emotional evaluative state, namely evaluative judgement and perception, encounter problems. In lieu of any other evaluative state that could play the required role, the defender of the content-priority view might turn to *sui generis* non-emotional value-*feelings*. But in doing so we are asked to entertain the possibility of an evaluative state which is tailored to support the content-priority view, and insofar as it is both non-doxastic and different from evaluative perception it might escape the criticisms made of those proposals.

A second criticism is that the relevant state may seem mysterious, and therefore theoretically problematic. We should, in general, avoid overpopulating our mental economies with theory-specific mental states; that is mental states the positing of which seems principally required to support a particular theory, and don't obviously serve any explanatory purpose in other contexts. We need reference to emotion, perception, and judgement in a range of personal level psychological explanations – and such states are (roughly) reflected in folk psychological categorizations. Contrastingly, *sui generis* pre-emotional value-*feelings* don't look as explanatorily indispensable and aren't obviously reflected in our folk psychology. Remember, appealing to appraisal theory in emotion psychology won't remove the air of mystery given the points raised in section 1.

The *sui generis* view has two responses to these criticisms. (1) If there are independent philosophical reasons why we can't do without the content-priority view, then we are compelled to posit some version of it (and perhaps a *sui generis* value-*feelings* version is as good, or as bad, as any other). I consider this response in section 4. The second response is to meet the criticism head-on by adducing some direct evidence for the *sui generis* view. That's what I consider in the rest of this section.

In the context of defending the view, Kevin Mulligan (2010: 488) puts forward the following phenomenological considerations: 'consider what happens when one finds a situation or a joke funny. Laughter and mirth or amusement may result...but is it not possible to be struck by the comic nature of a situation or joke without reacting affectively? Or without

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<sup>24</sup> See Mulligan 2009: 141–61; 2010: 475–500; von Hildebrand 1916: 137; Müller 2017: 293. Mulligan claims to find this view in Scheler 1973, although see Poellner 2016: 7, fn.9 on why this is a problematic interpretation.

<sup>25</sup> See Deonna and Teroni 2012: 93–4, for this criticism (in the context of epistemic issues).

laughing? Mechanical laughter at what one finds funny in the absence of any affective response seems to be a common phenomenon'. An affirmative answer to whether it is possible to be 'struck by the comic nature of a situation without reacting affectively' motivates in favour of positing a non-emotional *sui generis* value-feeling. To account for the relevant phenomenology, we would have to posit some *sui generis* 'feeling of the comic'.

However, the example, and Mulligan's take on it, is problematic. First, any suggestion that the absence of laughter attests to the non-emotionality of the relevant putative value awareness is false. Laughter is not plausibly a necessary condition on finding something amusing; laughter may typically accompany or follow episodes of amusement but is not necessary. I may find a particularly dry and witty comment amusing without laughing, and such a case is not plausibly one of withholding laughter.<sup>26</sup> Further, a significant amount of laughter is not occasioned in response to that which we necessarily find amusing anyway, but rather serves a range of non-affective functions, as is reflected in social bonding and ingratiation behaviors (e.g. awkward laughing upon greeting). So, laughter is neither a necessary pre-requisite of amusement, not a reliable guide to the presence of the relevant emotionality. Moreover, 'mechanical laughter' sounds closer to an instance of emotional insincerity, like 'faked smiles' and 'crocodile tears'. In none of these cases is there genuine emotionality, but that is not plausibly because they involve some *sui generis* non-emotional awareness of value. Rather this is more simply because they are (more or less) strategic attempts to 'fake emotion', often with the aim of convincing other people that one is emotionally sensitive to the relevant situation.

More decisively, we can provide an alternative interpretation of the example, from which the content-priority view doesn't follow. To do so we need to be cognizant of the way in which 'reacting affectively' to the amusing can range from rolling over with uncontrollable laughter, say when someone finds something hilarious, to 'mild' or 'dry' amusement. Mild amusement won't involve the characteristic laughter, bodily dimensions, expressions and action tendencies that we find in those cases of finding something hilarious. So, in the case where one imagines being 'struck by the comic nature of a situation or joke', we are not – so the alternative interpretation goes – imagining a state without affectivity. Rather, what we are imagining is a form of mild amusement without the hallmarks of typical episodes of finding something very funny. So, on this alternative interpretation, being 'struck by the comic' involves a more minimal, typically non-bodily, affectivity. If this is a plausible interpretation, then the example fails to decisively show that it is possible to be 'struck by the comic nature of a situation without reacting affectively', and so we have not been given sufficient motivation for positing non-emotional *sui generis* value-feelings.

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<sup>26</sup> For empirical evidence supporting this claim see Fridlund 1994.

However, the defender of the view is likely to question what exactly this minimal affectivity amounts to. Peter Poellner (2016: 6) interprets Max Scheler as specifying such a component:

We might call the experiences he has in mind felt approval or felt disapproval of an actual or possible ‘object’ existing or continuing to exist in so far as it possesses the relevant (dis)value. The felt approval or disapproval here, Scheler wants to say, is not a reaction to another, putatively non-valenced kind of experiential access to those values; rather, it presents itself as an uptake of the value’s *pro tanto* justified ‘demand’ to be or remain actual (if it is a positive value). And it is that property of meriting to-be-actual that partly constitutes a positive evaluative property as such. It is (partly) what that evaluative property is. Hence there could not be a non-valenced transparent experience of it, one that did not essentially involve such felt favour or disfavour.

Let’s apply part of this proposal to the case of humor. The minimal affective component in such a case would be something like a psychological ‘pro-attitude’ toward that which is *humorous*, as a conscious felt approval (or favour), an affective attitude, which is intentionally directed toward the evaluative standing of the object of the experience. Yet, as Poellner makes explicit, this felt approval is not a reaction to a pre-emotional experiential awareness of value, but rather is supposed to be the means through which one has the primary experiential encounter with the relevant object’s value (and, according to Poellner, its demand, as a positive value, to remain actualized) – as a self-standing, conscious affective-evaluation.

There is much about this picture that would need fleshing out in terms of the content of emotional experience and its intentional structure, but it provides an alternative interpretation of the example without committing to the content-priority view. It suggests that a phenomenologically accurate account of an experiential encounter with value necessarily implicates some kind of minimal affectivity, as something like affective attitudes of felt (dis)approval. Naturally, intuitions may clash on which is the more plausible description of the case, but any claim that such a case provides incontestable phenomenological evidence for the *sui generis* content-priority view is too strong given this possibility.

To further cast doubt on the phenomenological credentials of the value-feeling view, consider the following. Aesthetic beauty is plausibly an evaluative property that is in some sense, and in relevant contexts, related to emotions such as admiration, awe and the like – the so-called aesthetic emotions. Consider a case, then, in which my friend tells me they went to the Louvre in Paris and saw the Mona Lisa. They recount how they were ‘moved by its beauty’, and were in awe of the painting. I reply that I, likewise, saw the painting, but it didn’t move me. My friend responds by asking ‘so it didn’t seem beautiful to you?’. I then retort, ‘no of course it did; it very much struck me as beautiful, but just didn’t move me’. At this point, my friend becomes confused and accuses me of not making sense.

The reason confusion results in this imagined exchange is because it doesn't make sense to say I was *struck* by the beauty of the painting but not *moved* by it. The relevant sense of being 'struck by beauty' and being 'moved by beauty' are broadly synonymous in this context, and so the distinction underlying the value-feeling view doesn't have traction. Perhaps the defender of the view will respond that the above case merely reflects an artifact of certain linguistic contexts for the use of 'being struck' by something. The problem with this response, however, is that the language of 'being struck by value' is an idiom that is supposed to be a more everyday reflection of the philosophical theory of *sui generis* pre-emotional value-feelings. If there are instances in which it is inappropriate or doesn't track the view in question then much the worse for the view.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from phenomenological considerations, attempts have been made to adduce linguistic evidence for the value-feelings view. Mulligan considers the difference between certain kinds of evaluative exclamations.<sup>28</sup> He begins by noting that it is plausible that in most contexts, and when the subject is being sincere, exclamations like "How sad I am!" or "How wretched I am" are forms of self-report of emotion.

However, a different set of exclamations putatively admit of a non-emotional reading. Mulligan considers the following: "How tragic/funny/unjust/shameful/lovely/vulgar/foolish!". It is clear that such exclamations involve evaluative predicates, but is it obvious that they express, as Mulligan puts it, 'the speaker's felt awareness of the tragedy, funniness, injustice, or foolishness of some object or situation'? More specifically, one might question whether it is obvious that they express a non-emotional, *non-doxastic* felt awareness of the relevant values.

Such exclamations could be read as truncated or paraphrased evaluative judgements, which, as such, involve conscious acts of evaluative predication. So, the critic might argue, they provide no clear evidence as to the emotionality or not of whatever 'felt awareness' putatively grounds them or provides reasons for them – they are just not the kind of thing we can use to decide between philosophical theories. Moreover, such exclamations do not obviously exclude an emotional state as the grounds for the expression (which is what the content-priority view needs to be the case). Consider the following. If it is plausible that we

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<sup>27</sup> Müller suggests in correspondence that the idiom 'impression of value' ('it seems/appears F') may better reflect our pre-theoretical grasp of the phenomenon. However, one issue is whether talk of a painting *seeming beautiful* in a non-emotional way (not implicating any minimal affectivity) makes the relevant seeming state too close to an *intellectual seeming* rather than the supposed primitive type of acquaintance with value, as a *sui generis* form of non-propositional awareness. For example, in the case of the painting its (non-emotionally) *seeming beautiful* looks analogous to the (dispassionate) art-critics intellectual intuition that the painting *seems beautiful*, which is plausibly a kind of cognitive state.

<sup>28</sup> See Mulligan 2010: 488-90; 2009: 164-5.

sometimes report or describe, for example, fear in terms of the *menacing approach of an assailant*, or aesthetic admiration in terms of the *manifest beauty of a painting*, then emotion is not always reported by way of emotional self-ascriptions involving first-person predication (e.g. “how afraid *I am*”; “how moved *I was*”). Consider this point applied to the following exclamations: “How terrifying it was!” or “It was terrifying!”. In such a case, it seems obvious an emotion is reported without any explicit self-referring terms figuring in the exclamation, but these seem to have the same linguistic structure as the exclamations Mulligan suggests support the content-priority view. Such exclamations, of course, may be suggestive of the speaker’s felt awareness of the *terrifying*, but the relevant awareness is plausibly emotional, or at least its being so cannot be ruled out just by examining the structure of the exclamation itself.

So, phenomenological and linguistic evidence considered here doesn’t obviously support the value-feeling view. Without further detailed specification of the relevant state, this version of the non-doxastic content-priority view is problematic.

#### IV. THE INDISPENSIBILITY OF THE CONTENT-PRIORITY VIEW

At the beginning of section 1, we saw that the content-priority view appeals to two central motivations; (a) the phenomenology of response to value and (b) the intelligibility of emotions. While discussion of various versions of the view has shown them all to be problematic it might be contended that *some version* of the view has to be correct otherwise we fail to be able to explain, and therefore might have to give up on, (a) and (b). In this final section, I make some suggestions that undermine this claim.

Let’s take the phenomenology of response to value first. The idea floated by the content-priority view is that any other proposal regarding emotions and emotional experience would misdescribe the relevant phenomenology. This comes out clearly in the claim, argued for by Müller, that an emotional response necessitates a response to something that is given *temporally prior* to the response.<sup>29</sup> If, in order for a subject to be intelligibly said to *respond to something*, that *something* has to be experientially given first (that is present to pre-reflective phenomenal consciousness), then we need some temporally prior pre-emotional evaluative state to accurately reflect the phenomenology of response to value. Moreover, given how revisionary it would be to give up on framing emotions as responses, the content-priority view is arguably indispensable, insofar as it provides the only way of respecting the relevant phenomenology.

One line of response to this is to appeal to views of emotional experiences which involve a singular component that both *responds to and originally represents value*. This would involve a distinct kind of affective intentionality, as not just whatever intentionality pertains to affective or emotion contexts (rather than belief or perceptual contexts), but a distinct form of *responsive*

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<sup>29</sup> Müller 2017: 289, 294. See also Mulligan 2007: 1-24.

(‘affective’) *representation*. Such a view might claim the phenomenology of response to value does not have to be cashed out as a response to a *separate* source of non-emotional evaluative information (the content-priority view). Rather, the affective response is that through which one first represents the relevant evaluative property on the basis of responding to it. Fear, for example, is not a response to an evaluation, but a self-standing affective-evaluation.

However, does this not violate the temporal constraint that Müller specifies - the idea that a response to  $x$  necessitates that  $x$  is given *temporally prior* to the response? Not obviously. It certainly runs counter to the idea that the relevant *value* is given temporally prior to the emotional experience, but such a view could hold that the object, and its non-evaluative features, are given temporally prior to the emotion, as a ‘cognitive base’ state.<sup>30</sup> Consider the following naïve description: I hear Beethoven’s 5th Symphony (the cognitive base state), and am overcome with joy (emotional experience). On the current proposal, the joy is plausibly described as an affective response to the music but is synchronously that on the basis of which the music *seems joyous*. In such a case I might plausibly describe myself as ‘responding to its value’, without committing to any temporally prior form of value awareness. The suggestion, therefore, would be that emotional experience contexts are distinctive insofar as responses can themselves be non-derivative, self-standing evaluative representations whose evaluative content does not figure in pre-emotional states prior to that representation. Of course, this is suggestive and needs working out in more detail, but it undermines the claim that the content-priority view is the only way of making sense of the phenomenology of response to value.

Next, I consider whether the content-priority view is the only way of capturing the intelligibility of emotion. Muller (2017: 293) claims that ‘some prior awareness as of value is presupposed by the very intelligibility of an emotion’. The justification for a version of this claim can be framed in terms of the way certain ‘because’ statements are formulated.<sup>31</sup> For example, Mary is angry with her mother *because* she made a rude comment about Mary’s weight; Dylan is incandescent *because* of the injustice of the imprisonment of Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter. Certainly, such statements provide an emotional context in which we are able to make sense of the emotion by reference to the relevant evaluative properties. But it is not obvious that they are only explicable on the content-priority view as its defenders assume. Mulligan, for example, claims they can be taken as suggesting that ‘our grasp of value, in the simplest cases’ is ‘outside emotions’.<sup>32</sup> But that is too strong. Such third-person reports are

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Deonna and Teroni (2012, ch.7 and 8).

<sup>31</sup> See also Norrick 1978, 65–73 (cf. Postal 1971). Cf. Muller 2017: sect 3.2 for some additional reasons for accepting it, turning on linguistic intuitions about the cancellability of such ‘because’ statements from ordinary emotion ascriptions.

<sup>32</sup> Mulligan 2010: 486.

surely not decisive with respect to philosophical theories, or indeed how we frame the intelligibility of the relevant emotional episode *as experienced*.

What if we provide a first-person version? Consider Bob Dylan's incandescence. Dylan hears about the trial and conviction of the Hurricane, and it makes sense *for him* to feel incandescent ('lit up') about it *because* it seems unjust to *him* – after all, 'the trial was a pig-circus, he never had a chance'.<sup>33</sup> Imagining oneself having Dylan's experience, it certainly would have made sense when hearing the details, to feel rising incandescence about the relevant injustice. And if one were to report it – as Dylan, in part, does in the song – it would seem as if incandescence was an intelligible 'emotional stance' to be taking in the light of the seeming injustice. Yet, this first-person description can be right and not necessitate the content-priority view.

All that seems to necessarily follow is that the emotion and the value are, as David Wiggins states in a similar context, 'made for each other'; the incandescence and the value property of the *unjust* are readily intelligible in terms of each other.<sup>34</sup> How this is cashed out philosophically is another matter. The content-priority view is one way, a different one, favourable to the evaluative-content view, would be as follows. The relevant sense of intelligibility as it figures in first-person emotional experience is as a *first-person immediate intrinsic intelligibility*. By immediate intrinsic intelligibility, I mean the way the majority of our emotional experiences seem to readily, and without conscious effort, make sense from the first-person perspective ('from the inside'). More specifically, they do so in a way that (a) does not require prior or consequent conscious reasoning (immediate), and (b) is putatively not dependent on anything extrinsic to the response – for example, mental states (e.g. judgements, perceptions, *sui generis* value-feelings) or actions prior to or consequent on the emotion – which I would have to be conscious of for it to make sense (intrinsic), and so which could be said to *ground* its intelligibility. Rather, arguably they can be sufficiently intelligible in this way just because of what they are, in part, intentionally directed toward – incandescence *experientially* is intelligible in this way because it is *about the unjust*. More could be said about this way of framing the intelligibility of emotion, but it shows that the cost of rejecting the content-priority view need not be that of giving up on 'making sense' of emotions from the first-person perspective.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to assess the content-priority view and its claims regarding pre-emotional value awareness, as an alternative to the evaluative-content view. Section 1 showed that there are good reasons, connecting to the central motivations for the view, to think that

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<sup>33</sup> See Dylan 1976: 'Hurricane'.

<sup>34</sup> Wiggins 1998.

the relevant ‘awareness of value’ implicated by the view requires, as the paradigmatic case, a personal level conscious state of explicit attention to value. We then moved on to specifying the relevant evaluative state in more detail, showing how doxastic versions of the view fall prey to a range of objections. The more promising non-doxastic versions, however, were also seen to be problematic on numerous grounds. More specifically, the evidence adduced for a proposed *sui generis* value-feeling is inconclusive, not least because there are alternative explanations of the relevant evidence which do not involve committing to the content-priority view. Relatedly, we finally we saw that the content-priority view is not indispensable with respect to accounting for the phenomenology of response to value and the intelligibility of the emotion, since there are arguably alternative ways of capturing these important features of emotions and emotional experience.

The overall conclusion is that extant versions of the view are problematic, and so at present we do not have a persuasive formulation of it. What defenders of the view should do in response to the issues raised is make explicit which version they are committed to, and show how the criticisms can be met. Failing that, the content-priority view will not be a plausible competitor to its principal rival, the evaluative content view.

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