

ENACTIVE EVALUATIVE SENTIMENTALISM*

SENTIMENTALISMO ENATIVO AVALIATIVO

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ABSTRACT *I argue for a version of evaluative sentimentalism according to which (i) affective responses are appearances of value and (ii) value judgments can repudiate or assent to these appearances. The starting point of my argument is Giovanna Colombetti's enactive conception of affectivity. According to Colombetti, an affective being is one that through its sense-making activity enacts meaningful value-laden distinctions and, thus, brings forth an Umwelt (i.e., an environment that has a specific significance for it). The elements of that Umwelt strike the affective being as meaningful or valuable and to be thus struck is to be affected by those things. In that sense, affective responses can be characterized as appearances of value. I hold that appearances of value are best understood as perceptions of affordances. This view has consequences for our understanding of value judgments. The evaluative concepts that are relevant to us must map onto distinctions that are meaningful to us. As such, relevant evaluative concepts must capture the significance of the elements in the Umwelt that affect the organism. The upshot is that the significance value*

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judgments ascribe to their objects can coincide with the meaning with which the object is presented to us in an affective response.

Keywords *Affectivity. Enactivism. Affordances. Evaluative Sentimentalism.*

RESUMO *Defendo uma versão de sentimentalismo avaliativo segundo a qual (i) respostas afetivas são aparências de valor e (ii) juízos de valor podem repudiar ou assentir a essas aparências. O ponto de partida do meu argumento é a concepção enativa de afetividade de Giovanna Colombetti. De acordo com Colombetti, um ser afetivo é um que, por meio de sua atividade de produção de sentido, traça distinções significativas, permeadas de valores e, assim, produz um Umwelt (isto é, um ambiente que tem um significado específico para ele). Os elementos desse Umwelt impactam o ser afetivo como significativos e ser assim impactado é ter uma resposta afetiva. Nesse sentido, respostas afetivas podem ser caracterizadas como aparências de valor. Sustento que as aparências de valor são melhor compreendidas como percepções de affordances. Essa tese tem consequências para nossa compreensão de juízos de valor. Os conceitos avaliativos que são relevantes para nós devem corresponder a distinções que são significativas para nós. Assim, conceitos avaliativos relevantes devem capturar o significado de elementos do Umwelt que afetam o organismo. O resultado é que o significado que juízos de valor atribuem a seus objetos pode coincidir com o significado com o qual o objeto nos é apresentado em uma resposta afetiva.*

Palavras-chave *Afetividade. Enativismo. Affordances. Sentimentalismo avaliativo.*

1. Introduction

Emotions can be rationally assessed. We say that emotions are reasonable or unreasonable, warranted or unwarranted, appropriate or inappropriate. Fear of a dangerous snake is reasonable; fear of a harmless puppy is not. Feeling guilty is appropriate if you have done something wrong, inappropriate if you are blameless. These examples illustrate the fact that there is a close relation between emotions and evaluative judgments:¹ an emotion and an evaluative

¹ In what follows I use “evaluative concepts” to cover not only “thin” evaluative concepts (good and bad), but any concept with an evaluative valence that can be used to draw a practically meaningful distinction. Dangerous,

judgment can agree with each other (as when one is scared of an animal one judges dangerous) or conflict with each other (as when one is scared of a puppy one judges to be harmless). That raises the question of how to characterize that relation.

Some have argued that emotions are constituted by evaluative judgments (Nussbaum, 2001), while others have argued that although emotions are feelings and not judgments, they represent things as danger, loss, offense, and as such have a representational content that corresponds to the representational content of evaluative judgments (Prinz, 2007).

In this paper I will defend an alternative proposal according to which affective responses are best understood as appearances of value that present their objects as endowed with a particular meaning and evaluative judgments are conceptual tools for thinking and talking about that very meaning. As such, evaluative judgments can repudiate or assent to the appearances of value in which affective responses consist.

The starting point of my argument is Giovanna Colombetti's enactive conception of affectivity. According to the enactive approach to cognition Colombetti builds upon, all living systems are sense-making systems. Through the activity of monitoring its conditions of viability and improving its situation when needed, a sense-making organism sets up an *Umwelt*, that is, an environment that has a specific significance for it. The elements of the *Umwelt* strike the organism as meaningful and, thus, exhibit a certain range of values. If we take affectivity to refer to the capacity to be affected (such that one is affected when something strikes one as meaningful, relevant, or salient), then an affective reaction always presents an aspect or element of the *Umwelt* as value-laden. In that sense, they can be characterized as appearances of value. That is the topic of section 2. In section 3, I provide an account of affective reactions based on ecological psychology that supplements Colombetti's account.² I introduce the ecological notion of a field of affordances and propose that we should understand appearances of value (and, thus, affective reactions) as perceptions of a particular configuration of the field affordances. Emotional episodes, in particular, should be understood as momentary and significant changes in the configuration of that field. In section 4, I argue that this view has consequences for our understanding of value judgments. If affective reactions

harmless, loss, success, insult, opportunity, are all examples of evaluative concepts.

² The view I put forward combines, therefore, elements of enactivism and ecological psychology. Even though doubts have been raised about the compatibility of both approaches (see Heft, 2020), recent developments indicate they can be brought together (see Baggs & Chemero, 2021; Heras-Escribano, 2019; Rolla & Figueiredo, 2021)

are perceptions of a configuration of the field of affordances, then conceptual evaluative judgments cannot be seen as descriptions of what an agent thinks when she emotes nor as a description of what the agent's emotions represent. How, then, can there be agreement or conflict between emotions and evaluative judgments? The answer, I propose, is to hold that affective responses present their objects as having a particular significance and evaluative concepts are tools for conceptually ascribing that very significance to objects. The resulting view is aptly characterized as a form of evaluative sentimentalism, not because it holds that affective responses are constituents of evaluative judgments or vice-versa, but because it holds that the significance that we ascribe to something when we use an evaluative concept and the meaning with which the object is presented to us in an affective response can be one and the same.

2. Enactive Affectivity

An affective being, as I will be using the term, is one that is capable of being affected in a meaningful way by things in its environment. And one is affected in this sense when something strikes one as meaningful, relevant, or salient (Colombetti, 2014, p. 15).

In this sense, affectivity is a broader phenomenon than the capacity to experience specific emotions or moods. One need not experience a specific emotion or mood to be affected by something. Any being that inhabits an environment that is significant for it, where somethings appear as meaningful or relevant, is already an affective being – one that has a capacity to be sensitive to what matters to it. Affectivity in this sense is what Colombetti calls “primordial affectivity” (Colombetti, 2014, p. 2).

This account of affectivity presupposes that an affective being is one that draws meaningful distinctions. The environment it faces is not a neutral world, but a landscape divided by value-laden lines: some things are to be sought after, others avoided, some are good, some are bad, some are dangerous and some are harmless, and so on.

According to the enactivist approach to cognition, living beings enact meaningful distinctions through their *sense-making* activity, effectively transforming the physical world into a *bona fide* environment for themselves. In this section, following Colombetti, I argue that affectivity rests upon a living being's sense-making capabilities. In particular, I hold that every affective being is one that through its sense-making activity enacts meaningful, value-laden distinctions.

2.1. Sense-Making

Sense-making is a central concept for the enactivist approach to cognition that has its roots in Maturana and Varela's (1980) theory of autopoiesis. According to autopoietic enactivism, all living systems are sense-making systems on account of being *autonomous* and *adaptive*.

An autonomous system is defined as an operationally closed and precarious system (Di Paolo et al., 2018, p. 35). A system is operationally closed when every process that constitutes the system is an enabling condition to at least one other process that constitutes the system and has as its own enabling condition at least one other constituent process. As such, the processes that constitute the system form a closed network of enabling relations. These circular enabling conditions draw a boundary between the autonomous system and its environment. While some processes that do not belong to the network can be enabling conditions to the processes within the network, they do not depend for their operation on the processes of the system. They are not, then, part of the closed network. The boundaries of the autonomous system are the boundaries of the closed network of processes that constitute it. In this sense, the autonomous system is self-individuating. And, to the extent that the continuation of its existence depends on the activity of the network of processes that constitute it, the autonomous system is also self-maintaining.

The system is also precarious because in the absence of the internal enabling relations, particular constituent processes tend to run down or extinguish. Given that every process in the network is an enabling condition to other processes, if the situation is not corrected, the system as a whole collapses.

The paradigmatic example of an autonomous system is the living cell. The processes that constitute the living cell are chemical processes. These processes form a metabolic network of interacting processes of production that continually regenerates itself. These processes recursively depend on each other for their realization as a network. Furthermore, the interaction of these processes creates and maintains a semipermeable membrane that constitutes the cell as a unity in the biochemical domain on which it exists and determines the domain of possible interactions of the cell with its environment (such as exchanges of matter or energy).

Some autonomous systems are also *adaptive*. Adaptivity refers to the capacity of certain autonomous, precarious systems to monitor their own situation with respect to their conditions of viability and, when needed, to react in an appropriate manner so as to keep the system going (Di Paolo, 2005). The paradigmatic example of an adaptive autonomous system is a motile bacterium. In order to maintain itself the bacterium needs sugar, so it swims

toward higher concentrations of sugar and away from noxious substances. In doing so, it regulates the self-generating network of processes that constitutes it in response to its condition, that is registered as viable (when the system meets higher concentrations of sugar) or not viable (when the system meets noxious substances) (Colombetti, 2015, p. 447).

Enactivists insist this process of self-regulation with respect to the conditions of environment is already an evaluation of the living system's surroundings (see Di Paolo et al., 2018, p. 32 and 34). As the system self-regulates its conditions of viability, the surroundings acquire meaning for it: for the bacterium, the noxious substance is something to be avoided, sugar is something to be sought after. Crucially, that is not to say that the bacterium is conscious or capable of making conceptual evaluative judgments. The point is rather that in virtue of how the network of processes that constitute the organism is set up, some interactions contribute to maintenance of the viability of the organism and others degrade it. These otherwise neutral events, then, acquire a normative status for the organism: they can be good or bad for its continuation (Di Paolo, 2005, p. 431). An adaptive system must be able to discriminate between these good and bad events and react appropriately: seeking the first and avoiding the last. Through this activity the organism discriminates or distinguishes (as Colombetti notes, 'to discern' literally means 'to cut off, to divide' – 2014, p. 18) what is good for itself from what is bad. For instance, by consistently responding in a different manner to sugar and to the noxious substance, the bacterium draws a distinction between what is good for itself and what is bad. The distinction is *enacted*, not represented, by the organism.

This process of evaluation, made possible by the autonomous and adaptive nature of living systems, is what enactivists call *sense-making*. Sense-making is the activity by means of which the organism enacts or brings forth a significant environment for itself – an environment where things have meaning and value to the organism and to which, therefore, it is not indifferent.

Importantly, the sense-making being does not distinguish between what is good and bad for itself as *good or bad* (or as favorable or detrimental to its continuation). It simply discriminates between environmental factors that are in fact favorable or detrimental to its continuation by identifying them and by reacting in a suitable manner. By that activity, however, it actually establishes which environmental factors are *significant to itself*. There are environmental influences that may have crucial consequences for the organism (such as the presence or absence of ionizing radiation) but which the organism is incapable of monitoring or reacting to. Even though these influences are crucial, they are not significant *to* the organism. Indeed, the organism creates meaning by

“subtracting” from the environment and monitoring and responding to only a small subset of ecological influences that impinge on it (Di Paolo et al., 2018, p. 36). The organism creates meaning for itself by not being indifferent to certain features of the environment (and by being indifferent to many others). This highlights the fact that a distinction can be meaningful *for* an organism only if it can discriminate that which is the object of the distinction. A distinction the organism cannot draw by means of its activity, a distinction to which it cannot respond, cannot be meaningful *to it*.

Because sense-making activity is the activity of an adaptive system that strives to maintain itself in precarious conditions it can be described as the activity of a *concerned* system (Weber and Varela 2002, p. 98 and 113; Thompson, 2007, p. 153) – one that aims and endeavors to maintain itself and, consequently, has more specific aims depending on what are conditions of its maintenance. Crucially, the proposal here is not that simple organism, as bacteria, experience concern as we do. The notion of concern is meant to make the point that the bacterium is not indifferent to its existence – it strives to maintain itself (Colombetti, 2015, p. 448). Concern is also enacted, not necessarily experienced. One enacts concern for a goal (such as the goal of maintaining one’s precarious existence) by discriminating between potential encounters with the environment that further and that threaten that goal and by consistently responding accordingly (seeking the former and trying to avoid the latter).

2.2. Sense-Making and Affectivity

A sense-making being, then, is one that through its interaction with the world enacts meaningful distinctions and, therefore, a significant environment for itself. Closely related to the notion of sense-making is the concept of *Umwelt*, as introduced by Uexküll’s ([1934] 2010). The *Umwelt* is the environment as experienced or lived from the perspective of the organism (Colombetti, 2014, p. 17). As such, the *Umwelt* is an environment that has a specific significance or value to the organism. So, a sense-making living system is one that, through its sense-making activity, enacts an *Umwelt* (Thompson and Stapleton, 2014, p. 25). For motile bacteria, for instance, the sugar gradient on which they swim “is not just a neutral physiochemical world but an *Umwelt* with a specific range of values for them: sugar is good, more sugar is better, less sugar is worse, noxious substance is bad, and so on” (Colombetti, 2014, p. 17).

Colombetti argues that an important consequence of this characterization of sense-making is that every sense-making organism turns out to be an affective organism. Recall that “affectivity” here does not mean the capacity

to experience specific emotions but the more general capacity to be affected by things in one's environment, where one is affected when something strikes one as meaningful, relevant, or salient. Given this characterization of affectivity, sense-making turns out to be an affective phenomenon because it is the enactment of an *Umwelt* and the notion of *Umwelt* is thoroughly affective. The *Umwelt* is not the merely the neutral physical surroundings with which the organism interacts but a place of meaning and value brought about by the organism's sense-making activity. As such, the *Umwelt* is constituted by that which the living system discriminates as relevant or salient, what matters to it and what it is concerned about. That is, the *Umwelt* is the world as it strikes the living system as significant (Colombetti, 2015, p. 448). Since any being that is affected by its environment is an affective being and every sense-making being sets up an *Umwelt* that is capable of affecting it, any sense-making being is already an affective being.

While I have no quarrel with Colombetti's view, my goal here is to argue for a version of evaluative sentimentalism, and for that the weaker thesis that every affective being is a sense-making being should suffice. The point I care to make is that every being that has the capacity to be affected by the environment is a sense-making being. One is affected when something strikes one as meaningful. But to be confronted with a meaningful environment is to inhabit an *Umwelt*. And the *Umwelt* is enacted through the organism's sense-making activity. So, every affective being is a sense-making being.³

In what follows I will understand the notion of an affective being along these lines: an affective being is a concerned being, one that through its sense-making activity enacts meaningful value-laden distinctions and, thus, brings forth an *Umwelt*. The elements of that *Umwelt* strike the affective being as meaningful, salient or valuable (that is, as mattering in some way) and to be thus struck is to be affected by those things.

3 This thesis is weaker than the claim that every sense-making being is an affective being because it cannot be targeted by objections that can be raised against latter. Particularly, one could hold that we can only say that an object in the environment strikes an organism as relevant if the organism experiences its own concern with that object and, therefore, only if the organism is conscious. To the extent that an organism can be a sense-making being without being conscious, that would entail that not all sense-making beings are affective beings. That is why Colombetti explicitly resists the claim that affectivity requires consciousness (2014, p. 2). Nevertheless, even if we accepted the objector's point, the claim that all affective beings are sense-making beings would remain unaffected. Since only that weaker claim is relevant for the purposes of this paper, I need not take a stand on the issue of whether affectivity requires consciousness.

3. Affective Responses as Appearances of Value

To have an affective response is to be struck by an element of the *Umwelt* as meaningful or mattering. But what is it for something to strike a being as meaningful? Meaning comes in all forms and shapes. Something can strike an organism as good or bad, a gain or a loss, an opportunity or a threat, as dangerous or harmless, as disgusting or appealing, and so on. One way to elaborate on that idea is to claim that affective responses present their objects as exhibiting a certain range of values.

This, of course, raises the question of how exactly an affective response presents its object as endowed with a particular value. Here it is tempting to claim that affective responses must somehow *represent* value. This is a common view in the debate about emotional appraisal.⁴ As far as I can see, this idea can be developed in two different ways.

One option is to hold that affective responses essentially involve some kind of cognitive state with conceptual content. Nussbaum (2001), for instance, claims that emotions are evaluative judgments. According to this view, emotions present their objects as value-laden because they literally conceptually ascribe value to them. This view faces a number of difficulties,⁵ not the least of which is to explain how a being that experiences emotions but lacks conceptual capabilities, such as a small child or a non-human animal, could make actual evaluative judgments.

Another option is to treat affective responses as symbols of certain meaningful organism-environment relations. This view was once defended by Prinz (2007). According to him, emotions are feelings of patterned changes in the body (2007, p. 53). Fear, for instance, is the feeling of the somatic changes our body undergoes in order to facilitate the flight-or-fight response. Prinz argues that patterned bodily changes associated with different emotions have evolved as responses to organism-environment relations that bears on the well-being of the organism. Fear, for instance, is a response to danger, and sadness is a response to loss. Prinz then combines this theory with the kind of naturalistic approach to representation defended by Dretske (1988). According to Dretske, a representation *M* represents that which it has the function of reliably detecting. Since emotions are “set up to be set off” by ecologically significant organism-

4 According to Appraisal Theory, emotions are elicited and differentiated on the basis of the appraisal of the personal significance of a situation, object, or event one is faced with (Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1999). The debate about emotional appraisal concerns how exactly to characterize the appraisals that are constitutive of emotions.

5 See Griffiths (2004) for a discussion.

environment relations (such as danger, loss, opportunity), they represent these relations (or concerns, as Prinz calls them). If the racing heart and blood flow to the extremities that characterizes fear tends to arise when and only when the organism is faced with danger, then fear (the perception of those bodily changes) represents danger. If sadness tends to occur when one experiences a significant loss, then sadness represents loss. And so on. According to Prinz, then, emotions represent the concerns to which they respond (Prinz, 2007, p. 63).

The main problem for this proposal, acknowledged by Prinz (see Shargel and Prinz, 2017, p. 113), is that it renders the emotion an arbitrary symbol of the concern it represents. On Dretske's theory, the content of a representation *M* is determined by the covariation between *M* and that which it represents. What *M* turns out to be (a mental state, a sound, set of bodily changes) is irrelevant to the determination of its content. It is no more than an arbitrary symbol of that which it represents.

The problem here is that we are looking for an explanation of the sense in which objects *strike* an emoting organism as meaningful. We would like to say that an emotion *presents* its object as value-laden and meaningful, and does so, at least in part, in virtue of the way in which it mobilizes the organism and directs its behavior. But merely tacking a representational content to an emotion, however, will not do the trick. First, if emotions represent concerns simply because they are correlated with them, then the fact they mobilize the organism to act in a particular way is irrelevant to determine their content. For instance, according to Prinz's theory, the fact that fear prepares the organism to a fight-or-flight response is not part of what makes it the case that fear represents its object as dangerous. It does so simply because it is correlated with danger in the same way as any other arbitrary symbol is. Second, if emotions are arbitrary symbols, then they do not necessarily present their objects as value-laden. An arbitrary symbol can only present that which it represents to those who know how to interpret it. An arbitrary symbol of danger, for instance, cannot present its object as dangerous to an organism unless the organism knows how to interpret it. For an organism that is not aware that the feeling of fear co-varies with danger (because, say, it does not have the capabilities necessary for this kind of complex thought), that feeling will be an opaque symbol. It may be true that it represents danger, just as the rings in a tree represent its age. But it will not present the fear-inducing object as dangerous to the emoting organism, just as the perception of the rings on a tree does not convey its age to someone who does not know how to read them. So, Prinz's theory cannot make sense

of the claim that when an organism experiences fear, the fear-eliciting object *strikes* the organism *as dangerous*.⁶

I propose that we take seriously the claim that affective responses in general, and emotions in particular, present their objects as value-laden. When an agent experiences an emotion, the emotion-eliciting object is *presented* to the agent as having a particular significance. When one experiences fear, for instance, the object is presented as dangerous – it *seems* dangerous to the agent. We should, then, take affective responses to be *appearances of value*. However, this view faces the following challenge: if we take appearances of value to be a kind of representational state, we will fall back on the same problems faced by Nussbaum and Prinz views. What we need, then, is a non-representational account of appearances of value.

That challenge can be met if we conceive of affective responses as perceptions of a particular configuration of the field of *affordances*.

3.1. *Appearances of Value as the Perception of a Field of Affordances*

The notion of affordance comes from Gibson's ecological theory of perception (2015). An affordance is a possibility for action the environment provides for the organism. A chair, for instance, affords sitting down. A lake affords swimming. And so on. Central to the ecological theory of perception is the claim that we perceive affordances.

Gibson understands perception as the picking up of information for purposes of behavioral discrimination, rather than for purposes of belief fixation (Scarantino, 2003, p. 953). There are energetic patterns in the environment that are correlated to objects or events (Gibson, 2015, p. 47). These patterns provide *ecological information* about the environment. As the organism explores its environment it can capture this information and use it to guide its behavior. This is what perception consists in. Crucially, according to Gibson, this process

6 I do not take this to be a knock-down argument against representational theories of emotions. What it does is to articulate a serious problem for these theories. Other versions of representationalism could be put forward in an attempt to solve the problem. Scarantino, for instance, offers a representational theory that emphasized the motivational role of emotions. According to her, emotions should be thought of as *pushmi-pullyu* representations that simultaneously represents a concern in Prinz's sense and motivate the agent to act in line with that concern (Scarantino, 2014, p. 166 and 177). While this theory ties the representational and motivational aspects of emotion more tightly, I do not think it successfully addresses the problem. The reason for that is when it comes to explain how emotions represent concerns, Scarantino (2014, p. 178) subscribes to Prinz's account. Even though she argues that emotions are constituted by action-tendencies, she holds that emotions represent concerns not in virtue of the way in which they mobilize the organism for action but simply because they are set up to be set off by certain concerns. This renders them arbitrary symbols of concerns and then there is no sense in which it the emotion-eliciting object strikes the emoting organism as value-laden.

does not require internal representations of the environment. So, perception is direct (Chemero, 2009, p. 23).

Perception in this sense is always perception of affordances. To perceive something is to perceive how to approach it and what to do with it (Gibson, 2015, p. 213). To say that we perceive affordances is not to say that our perceptual states represent affordances. Perception is not representational. The point is that the detection of ecological information is not made for its own sake. It always serves the practical purpose of guiding the organism's behavior in light of its goals. By detecting ecological information, the organism is able to identify the possibilities of action that are available to it and, thus, guide its behavior accordingly. Perception just is that process of capturing and using ecological information to determine the available courses of action and, for that reason, perception is always perception of affordances.

Appearances of value can be understood as perceptions of affordances. By doing so, we can hold that affective responses present their objects as having a particular significance without taking them to have conceptual or even representational content. According to this suggestion, to see an object as having a particular significance is simply to see it as affording a particular reaction. In fear, for instance, the object is presented to us as dangerous and that amounts to seeing the object as affording harm or as affording fleeing. In anger the object of the emotion is presented as the perpetrator of an offense and that amounts to seeing the object or situation as affording retribution for a harm or offense. In disgust the object is presented as disgusting and that amounts to seeing the object as affording avoidance or removal.

There is an immediate difficulty to be reckoned with here. I am proposing that we take appearances of value to be perceptions of affordances. But appearances of value and evaluative judgments must be capable of agreeing or conflicting with each other. The problem is that if affordances are mere possibilities of action the environment provides, and appearances of value are perceptions of these affordances, then there will hardly be any possibility of conflict between appearances of value and evaluative judgments.

Suppose, for instance, that fear involves the perception of an object as affording running away. And suppose I judge the object of my fear (say, a dog I found in the park) not to be actually dangerous, so that there is no point in running from it. There was supposed to be a conflict here, between the affective response and the judgment, but there is none. The object of the fear (the dog) does afford running away, for that is one possibility of action my encounter with it provides. If it is small enough, it also affords jumping over or lifting it in the air, grabbing its tail, and so on. These are possible ways of interacting with the

dog. And running away is just another option. So, there is no incompatibility in seeing the dog as dangerous (that is, seeing as affording running away) and judging it to be harmless.

In order to deal with this problem, we need to distinguish between a mere affordance and perceiving an affordance as relevant. Given that affordances are mere possibilities for action, virtually every object affords multiple actions for an organism. A chair affords sitting, but it also affords standing on, putting a book on, turning upside down, kicking, jumping over, and so on. The more abilities an organism has, the richer its environment will be in affordances. Most of these affordances, however, will be irrelevant because they have no bearing on the agent's concerns at the time (Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014, p. 341). So, they will remain unnoticed. Some of the available affordances will stand out for the agent as particularly relevant. They are not mere possibilities for action, but possibilities that the situation allows for, invites or solicits (depending on how they relate to the organism's current concerns). These affordances are perceived by the agent.

The image of a field is useful here. Some relevant affordances are experienced as immediately soliciting or inviting an action and others stand in the horizon as potentially relevant to the agent at some point in the future. A field of affordances can capture the way in which this collection of affordances invites the agent to act (Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014, p. 348). The field can be illustrated as a graph in which the lateral axis depicts the scope of affordances the agent engages with and tracks, the depth axis represents the temporal horizon (or the dimension of anticipation) and the vertical axis depicts the degree of solicitation or relevance of the affordance (see figure 1). This image emphasizes that at any time there are generally multiple affordances soliciting the agent, that these affordances may differ in relevance or strength, that they may be seen as soliciting immediately or at some point in the future (Withagen et al., 2017, p. 12). It also illustrates the fact that the field dynamically changes when either the concerns of the agent, the environment or the available affordances change.

Bruineberg and Rietveld (2014, p. 3) illustrate these changes with the example of a rabbit. A carrot affords eating for the rabbit. If the rabbit is famished and looking for food, that affordance will appear to it as immediately soliciting to a high degree. If the rabbit eats the carrot, it changes the landscape of affordances by removing an object from the environment. As the landscape changes and the rabbit's interest in eating diminishes, new affordances move forward, so to say, as immediate solicitations. The rabbit hole may now afford sleeping, or some region may invite exploration. The same kind of change can originate from the environment. For the eating rabbit, a loud sound nearby may

change the field so that the solicitation of the carrot loses precedence and now the rabbit hole presents itself as soliciting hiding.

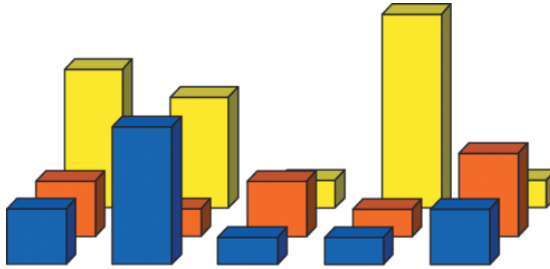


Figure 1 A sketch of the field of relevant affordances at a certain point in time. The height of the columns refers to the degree of solicitation or relevance of the affordance. The width, depicted as the number of columns that are placed next to each other horizontally, reflects the scope of affordances the individual is engaging with. The depth of the field reflects the temporal dimension, namely, the anticipatory character of engagement with relevant affordances.

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I propose that affective responses are perceptions of a particular configuration of the field of relevant affordances. Something affects an organism when some of its affordances are perceived as part of that field. In this sense, our perception of the environment, which takes the form of the perception of the field of affordances, is always and constantly permeated by affectivity.

Emotional episodes can be understood as momentary and significant changes in the configuration of that field. Consider Griffiths and Scarantino's (2009, p. 441) example of an antelope suddenly confronted with a lion. The antelope in this situation will experience fear. Suddenly the fleeing affordance it perceives when it perceives the lion will take absolute precedence over all other affordances it was tracking, temporarily obfuscating all other concerns. That affordance will be experienced as a very urgent solicitation to flight. Correspondingly, all of the antelope's cognitive, perceptual and motoric abilities will be recruited to pick to information about the environment, to discover affordances in the environment that allow for escape and to execute the corresponding actions. The appearance of danger embodied in the heightened

fear the antelope experiences just is the perception of this sudden shift in the configuration of the field of relevant affordances. Emotions thus understood are not isolated affective events in and otherwise affectively-neutral existence, but modulations in an on-going affective engagement with the world.

3.2. The Perception of a Field of Affordances as an Experience of Value

This view faces yet another problem. Objects with the same kind of ecological significance for an organism can be perceived as affording different reactions in different circumstances. On one occasion, for instance, a dangerous animal can be perceived as affording running away, while on another occasion it is perceived as affording hiding, and in yet another occasion (when it is hanging around at a safe distance) it may only afford keeping an eye on it or keeping your distance. In each case, the organism perceives a different affordance, but all of these different perceptions can be seen as presenting the animal with the same significance – as dangerous. They are all different appearances of the same value. But what unifies them as appearances of the same value? What exactly is the relation between the perception of an affordance as part of the field of relevant affordances and the presentation of a particular value?

The perception of an affordance can only present its object as having a particular significance for a being that draws the corresponding distinction. For instance, the perception of an evasion affordance can only present its object as dangerous to an organism that draws the distinction between dangerous and harmless objects or situations. In order to understand how the perception of different affordances can all present their objects as having the same significance we have to explain how the perception of affordances relates to those meaningful distinctions.

In section 2, I argued that significant distinctions are ones that are enacted by a sense-making being. A sense-making being is a concerned being and through its concerned dealings with the world it draws meaningful distinctions. These distinctions, to the extent they are meaningful, reflect the organism concerns. The motile bacterium, for instance, by reacting in one way to higher concentrations of sugar and in another way to noxious substances discriminates (in the sense of cutting off, separating) what is good for itself from what is bad from itself. The bacterium enacts the distinction and, in enacting it, manifests its concern with its own maintenance. The mode of behavior that draws the distinction is underpinned by the perception of affordances. The bacterium perceives sugar as affording swimming towards and noxious substances as affording swimming away.

More complex and flexible modes of behavior may also draw distinctions in this manner. Consider an organism that when faced with certain kinds of animals regularly reacts by adopting evasive maneuvers, or by hiding, by keeping a distance, and so on, and that when faced with other kinds of animals reacts by approaching, interacting, hanging around, and so on. This is a quite varied set of affordances. But an organism that acted on them would thereby discriminate dangerous animals from harmless animals. That is a meaningful distinction for that organism. However, its meaning and significance is not read off directly from the affordances the organism responds to, but from the concern the distinction reflects. The distinction the organism draws is a distinction between dangerous and harmless animals, and not between, say, animals that make it shy and animals it is comfortable with, because it reflects the organism's concern with its life and physical integrity.

What I propose is that the perception of an affordance presents an object as having a particular significance when that affordance is one of the many affordances that underpin the complex mode of behavior that enacts the corresponding meaningful distinction. For instance, perceiving an animal as affording fleeing, hiding or keeping your distance are all different ways of seeing the animal as dangerous because all of these affordances underpin the complex mode of behavior that draws the distinction between dangerous and harmless animals.

It is because they fit in the same complex pattern of behavior and serve the same concern that different affordances can be said to present their objects with the same significance. The perception of each of them is a *different appearance of the same value*. In general, the more complex the pattern of behavior that draws a significant distinction, the larger will be the number of different appearances the same value can exhibit.

This explains explain how the perception of different affordances can be an appearance of the same value. But the same affordance can be associated with different values. Perceiving something as affording keeping your distance can present the object as dangerous or as disgusting, for instance. What makes a particular perception of that affordance an appearance of danger, say, and not a perception of the object as disgusting? The answer is that, as discussed above, the perception of affordances as part of the field of relevant affordances reflects the organism's concerns. If the perception of the keeping-your-distance affordance reflects a concern with the preservation of life and limb (and not, say, a concern to avoid contamination) then it is as appearance of danger and not disgust. Now, concern is also enacted, and in the small timescale of single encounters it is reflected in how the field of affordances changes as the situation

develops. Suppose you see a large, angry animal at a distance and perceives it as affording keeping your distance. Your colleague anesthetizes the animal. As the animal loses consciousness, the field of affordances changes. The animal no longer affords keeping away. Now it affords approaching so it can be studied. The field of affordances changed because the animal no longer posed a threat to your physical integrity. So, in this case, the perception of the avoidance affordance reflected a concern for one's physical integrity and that is why it was an appearance of danger and not of disgust.

This puts us in a position to further clarify in what sense perceptions of affordances present their objects as meaningful or value-laden. A sense-making organism enacts a meaningful environment by discriminating, through its behavior, between elements of the environment that have ecological significance to it. But the way in which the organism discerns elements of the environment that have a particular meaning to it is by perceiving certain affordances (namely, the affordances that underlie the concerned mode of behavior that draws the distinction). The perception of affordances is how the organism accesses the meaningful distinctions it enacts. In that sense, the perception of affordances is the way in which these distinctions show up for the organism. And that is why the perception of an affordance is an appearance of value.

4. Enactive Evaluative Sentimentalism

So far, I have argued that affective responses are perceptions of a configuration of the field of relevant affordances. That account gives content to the idea that affective responses are appearances of value. Something seems to have a particular value or significance for an organism when some of its affordances figure in the organism's perceived field of relevant affordances.

If appearances of value are perceptions of affordances, they do not have representational content. When we say that an affective response presents an object to the organism as, say, dangerous, we are not saying that it somehow represents the object as dangerous. So, the judgment that something is dangerous cannot be said to assert the representational content of an appearance of danger. What, then, is the relation between an appearance of value and the corresponding evaluative judgment?

Consider the emotions of a non-human animal. Assume that the animal cannot manipulate evaluative concepts and so is incapable of making judgments and assume that the bodily changes associated with its emotions do not literally represent concerns. If that animal experiences fear, we can still correctly claim that its fear presents the fear-eliciting object as "an immediate and concrete

physical danger” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 64). Here, the evaluative concept “danger” is being used in a non-evaluative context, in the sense that it is not being used to make an evaluative judgment. Rather, it is simply used to describe how the object affected the animal. If that description is not a description of what the animal is thinking nor a description of what its bodily states represent, what is it describing? The answer is that it describes the significance of that object for the animal – the meaningful manner in which the object affects the animal.⁷

So, in non-evaluative uses, evaluative concepts can be used to describe the ecological significance with which features of the environment are presented to us in affective responses. When the same concepts are used evaluatively, to make an evaluative judgment, they are used not to describe that significance, but to ascribe it to objects. That is, evaluative concepts are used to ascribe to objects, persons or events exactly the same kind of significance with which these objects are presented to us in affective responses.

I propose that we understand the relation between appearances of value and evaluative judgment in the following way: affective responses present their objects as having a particular significance and evaluative concepts are tools for thinking about and talking about that very significance. The concept “dangerous”, for instance, captures the particular significance an object is presented as having when it strikes us as dangerous (and something strikes us as dangerous when we see it as affording fleeing, harm, and so on). As such, the concept “dangerous” can be used to assent to or reject appearances of value. Suppose that when faced with a wild animal my field of affordances is transformed in such a way that the running away affordance becomes very prominent. That is an appearance of value. And it presents the wild animal as having a particular significance – it is an impending threat and a serious one. If I judge the animal to be dangerous, I conceptually ascribe to it the same significance with which my affective response presented it – I hold it to be, in fact, an impending threat. In that manner, I assent to the appearance of value. If I judge that the animal is not actually dangerous, I deny it the significance with which my affective reaction presented it. In that way, I reject the appearance of value.

When I assent to an appearance of value, I take it to be appropriate and, thus, judge its object to actually afford (in the stronger sense of allowing, inviting or soliciting) the reaction I perceive it as affording. When I deny an appearance of value, I take it to be inappropriate and, thus, I judge its object

7 See Griffiths (2004) for a discussion of this proposal in the context of appraisal theory.

not to actually afford the reaction I perceive it as affording. That accounts for the practical relevance of evaluative judgments.

This view also accounts for the rational assessment of affective responses and explains how that assessment is connected to the way in which affective responses prompt and direct behavior (their practical dimension). Given that affective responses are perceptions of a certain configuration of the field of relevant affordances, they present the situation with which the organism is confronted as allowing or calling, to a greater or lesser extent, for a certain reaction. We can understand how an affective response thus conceived can conflict with an evaluative judgment. If I judge that the reaction afforded is not called by the situation or does not make sense in that situation then the judgment conflicts with the appraisal. If one experiences fear when faced with a harmless dog, for instance, one sees the dog as calling for evasive maneuvers. If one judges that the situation does not call for evasion (that the dog is not really dangerous), then one is assessing one's fear as inappropriate – it presents the situation as calling for a reaction it does not really call for.

An important advantage of this view is that it can explain how the conceptual distinctions we use to describe appearances of value can apply to organisms that lack the corresponding concepts. We can *correctly and non-metaphorically* say that when the antelope sees a lion, the lion strikes it as dangerous. And that is the case even though the antelope does not have the conceptual capabilities necessary to entertain the thought that the lion is dangerous. When we say that the lion strikes the antelope as dangerous, we are simply using evaluative concepts to describe the significance with which the antelope's fear presents the lion (or, alternatively, to describe the ecologically meaningful distinction the antelope accesses and discriminates via the perception of affordances that is constitutive of its fear). The appearance of value in which that fear consists, however, is nothing but the perception of a quite dramatic change in the antelope's field of affordances.

The resulting view is aptly characterized as a form of evaluative sentimentalism, even though it is not committed to the claim that affective responses are constituents of evaluative judgments or vice-versa.⁸ First, it holds that the significance or value that we ascribe to something when we use an evaluative concept and the meaning with which the object is presented to us in an affective response can coincide. That entails that our affective experiences are experiences of value. When we feel fear, we actually (not metaphorically)

8 As Prinz (2007) and Nussbaum (2001), respectively, would have it.

experience the object of the emotion as dangerous. When we are proud of something we did, we experience it as an achievement. Second, it entails that every evaluative distinction that is meaningful for an organism must correspond to a distinction that can be affectively experienced by the organism. Meaningful evaluative concepts capture the ecological significance certain objects or events have for the organism. But meaningful distinctions are enacted by the organism sense-making activity. So, meaningful evaluative concepts must map onto the significant distinctions the organism enacts through its sense-making activity. They must correspond to the distinctions that constitute the organism *Umwelt*. These are distinctions that the organism can affectively experience (provided it is an affective organism). So, meaningful evaluative concepts must capture the significance of the elements in the *Umwelt* that can affect the organism. That is, every meaningful evaluative concept corresponds to an evaluative distinction the organism can experience in the form of an affective response. There is no meaningful evaluative distinction that cannot be affectively experienced.

This view, however, raises a problem concerning the content of evaluative judgments and how it is related to affective responses that will be discussed in the next section.

4.1. Connecting Evaluative Judgments and Affective Responses

According to the view I am defending, affective responses present their objects as having a particular significance but they do not have representational content. To see an object as imbued with a particular significance is, for some of its affordances, to figure in the field of relevant affordances. And the perception of affordances is not a matter of representing affordances, but rather the deployment of cognitive, perceptual and motoric abilities to pick up information in order to produce behavior that is conducive to the organism's goals. Significance in this sense is enacted, not represented or judged. Nevertheless, evaluative judgments can conceptually ascribe or deny to an object the same significance with which an affective response presented it. Therefore, the non-representational, contentless affective response and the content-involving, conceptual judgment can agree or disagree even though they do not share a common content. How is that possible? How can these two kinds of cognitive performances interact?

This problem is a particular reiteration of a general problem faced by radically embodied cognition theories. To the extent these theories hold that there is a basic level of contentless cognition and another level of cognition that involves judgments, concepts and so forth, they are faced with the task of explaining how these two levels can interact and come together. I do not

expect to provide a complete answer to this problem here. The more modest goal of this section is point out how the problem can be approached at the level of the connection between affective responses and evaluative judgments. This particular problem is in some respects similar to the interface problem faced by the Radical Enactive view of Cognition (REC). So, it will be helpful here to consider this problem and how REC can deal with it.

REC is characterized by the claim that all cognition is a matter of organism/environment interaction that is best understood in terms of the exercise of abilities and need not involve the processing of mental representations that carry content (Hutto and Myin, 2017, p. 118–119 and p. 140–143). REC holds, then, that certain forms of basic cognition (such as perception) are contentless. Nevertheless, REC acknowledges the existence of higher level, content-involving cognition. A cognitive activity has content when it “characterizes or specifies something else, in a certain way, such that this characterization or specification is evaluable in in terms of truth or accuracy” (Myin & van den Herik, 2021, p. 12179). Thus, making the judgment “Snow is white” is a content-involving activity because it specifies something (the color of snow) in such a way that it is evaluable in terms of truth or falsity.

The distinction between a basic mind and a content-involving mind leads to the interface problem. The problem is how these two minds can come together and interact in a particular situation. Consider the example of memory. According to REC, a basic episode of remembering, for instance, may consist in a re-enactment of an experience. As such, it is akin to seeing a scene and, therefore, contentless. But human beings are also capable of autobiographical remembering, that can be expressed in the form of contentful judgments. Suppose I re-enact the episode in which the neighbor’s dog rushed towards me and then I express my memory as “last Friday the neighbor’s dog scared me”. It seems that in this case a basic mind and a content-involving mind are operative in the same activity of remembering. But how can they come together and forge a connection in this case?

The answer favored by supporters of REC is to deny that there are two minds operating here. Rather, REC holds that all forms of cognition, basic and content-involving, are a matter of the exercise of abilities, competence and know-how (Myin & van den Herik, 2021, p. 12177). Basic cognitive capacities become content-involving capacities by becoming embedded in content-involving practices. In a case in which there seems to be an interface between two different kinds of mind, what we actually have is the activity of a single cognitive capacity that is the result of the integration of contentless capacities with the capacities and know-how that underlie a content-involving practice.

According to REC, content arises when certain social communicative practices are in place. Chief among these are *truth-telling practices* (Myin & van den Herik, 2021, p. 12179). Truth-telling are practices involving public norms for the use of symbols, where such norms depend for their existence on a range of customs and institutions (Hutto and Myin 2017, p. 12). At the core of these practices is the activity of socially regulating our thought and our expressions. For instance, we correct a child when she mistakenly says that the cat is on the mat when it is sitting beside it, we teach her that that is a goose and not a duck, we tell her that she is using the word “surreptitiously” incorrectly, and so on. These practices instill a sensitivity to the correctness of what we say and think and can give origin to an ability of the individual to self-regulate her thinking and talking. To be able to do so, that individual must be able to ask question such as: “is she correct in saying that?”, “how should this word be used?” or “is it true that x...?”. This is a reflexive capacity to talk and think about our talking and thinking. Once these practices are in place, it becomes possible to engage in the activity of making assertions that are evaluable in terms of truth or falsity (Hutto and Myin, 2017, p. 90–91). So, in order for content to arise, what is needed are “truth-telling practices, understood as reflexive, or meta-linguistic practices, that consist in abilities to talk about talking” (Myin & van den Herik, 2020, p. 12188).

Once a truth-telling practice is in place, the cognitive possibilities available to a creature are transformed. According to REC, forms of contentless cognition can become content-involving in certain circumstances. For instance, when a creature acquires the capacities for speaking, judging and narrating, her capacity for remembering can be transformed. The capacity for basic, contentless remembering can become interlaced with narrating. The creature, then, becomes capable of remembering autobiographically (see Hutto and Myin, 2017, chapter 9) and can make memory-based claims that are contentful (such as “last Friday the neighbor’s dog sacred me”). In this way, thanks to the scaffolding provided by social-cultural truth-telling practices, the content-involving capacity for autobiographical remembering can be built on the contentless capacity for basic remembering. (Myin & van den Herik, 2021, p. 12179-80). When one remembers autobiographically, then, what we have is not an interface between contentless and content-involving cognition, but rather the deployment of a cognitive capacity that is the result of the diachronic integration of contentless cognitive capacities with content-involving practices and the forms of competence and know-how that underlie these practices.

I propose that we approach the question of how evaluative judgments are related to affective responses in a similar way. We should take the capacity

to make evaluative judgments as a capacity that developed from more basic, contentless cognitive capacities. We should not, however, see the ability to make evaluative judgments as developing from our capacity for affective responses, but rather as developing from a different but related capacity.

Our capacity for affective responses is a contentless, basic cognitive capacity. The embedment of this capacity in a truth-telling practice may well lead to a capacity to conceptually articulate one's affective responses, as well as to conceptually ascribe affective states to others and oneself and to challenge those attributions. That is not, however, the business of evaluative judgments. Evaluative judgments are not tools for talking about affective responses, but rather tools for thinking and talking about the kind of significance that affective responses present their objects as having. A creature that is capable of making evaluative judgments is not simply a creature that is sensitive to the correctness of attributions of affective states, but one that is sensitive to the appropriateness of the affective state itself. I propose that instead of seeing our capacity for evaluative judgment as a development of the capacity for affective responses, that we see it as a development of the capacity for socially regulating affective responses.

Just as there are practices of socially regulating thought and speech, there are practices of socially regulating affective responses. When a child is scared of something harmless, we soothe her. When she hurts another child, we try to make her empathize with the harm she caused in order to get her to feel guilty. If she is angry, we ask her to explain how she was wronged. And so on. In the same way that the practice of socially regulating our thinking and talking instills a sensitivity to the correctness of what we say and think, the practice of socially regulating our affective responses can instill a sensitivity to the appropriateness of our affective responses. This sensitivity is the ground for a capacity for self-regulating one's own affective responses. Once truth-telling practices are in place, this sensitivity can become interlaced with our capacity for making judgments. That sensitivity can be linguistically expressed in the form of questions about the appropriateness of an affective response ("is that really dangerous?" or "have I really been wronged?") whose answers take the form of an evaluative judgment.

According to this proposal, then, our capacity for making evaluative judgments is a complexification, scaffolded by truth-telling practices, of our capacity for self-regulating our affective states. To return to our initial question, evaluative judgments can interfere with affective states simply because the capacity for making evaluative judgments is built atop a capacity for self-regulating our affects. Evaluative judgments are capable of interfering with

affective states, to the extent that they are, because the capacity to make these judgments is a development of a kind of know-how concerned with the task of managing, directing and changing our affective states. Notably, evaluative judgments frequently fail to interfere with our affective states. One frequently finds oneself persisting in an affective response one judges inappropriate. On the present account, that is a reflection of the fact that our capacities for regulating both our and other's affects are imperfect, limited, and prone to fail, especially when confronted with particularly intense affective responses.

5. Conclusion

I have argued in favor of a form of enactive evaluative sentimentalism. According to this view, affective responses are best understood as appearances of value that present their objects as having a particular significance and evaluative judgments conceptually ascribe to objects the very same kind of significance. As such, evaluative judgments can be used either to repudiate or to assent to these appearances of value.

The starting point of my argument was an enactive conception of affectivity. Following Colombetti, I argued that an affective being is a being that through its sense-making activity enacts an *Umwelt*. The elements of that *Umwelt* strike the affective being as meaningful and to be thus struck is to be affected by those things. I then built upon Colombetti's account in two ways. First, I argued that the claim that an organism is affected when something strikes it as meaningful naturally led to the view that affective responses are appearances of value. Second, I argued that appearances of value are perceptions of a particular configuration of the field of relevant affordances. Finally, in light of this view, I argue that in order to account for the possibility of agreement or disagreement between evaluative judgments and affective responses/appearances of value, we should understand evaluative concepts as tools for conceptually ascribing to objects the same kind of significance with which they are presented to us in affective responses.

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