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## THE SENSIBILITY OF REASON: OUTLINE OF A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FEELING

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### 1) *Purpose of this paper*

**W**HAT is the state of the art concerning emotions?

Let’s sketch out a short answer, referring to a) contemporary phenomenology b) general contemporary philosophy.

On the one hand, emotions should be, and indeed are, privileged objects of research for phenomenology – particularly for the branch of research now flourishing that has been termed “Four *e* phenomenology” – because of the insight that no satisfactory account of mind can be offered without considering the mind’s embodiment: the environment in which a living body is embedded, the way in which life is enacted within such a lifeworld, and the extra-bodily extensions of mind which make up the cultural layer of a human, and indeed social, lifeworld.

On the other hand, philosophers of very different backgrounds have become aware of the fundamental importance of the realm of feeling in both the cognitive and practical exercise of reason. Let’s concentrate on this latter connection between *emotions and practical reason*. Think of phenomena universally recognized as relevant to morality, such as compassion, sympathy, guilt, remorse, regret, indignation, and even wrath, or just respect, admiration, or contempt. Or think of recent works on political emotions.

Classical and contemporary phenomenologists have produced extended studies of particular emotional phenomena relevant to moral-

ity, concentrating on aspects such as remorse,<sup>1</sup> anxiety,<sup>2</sup> shame,<sup>3</sup> anger,<sup>4</sup> awe,<sup>5</sup> and wonder...<sup>6</sup>

Now it seems to me that this research concerns two levels of affective sensibility: one that is basically embodied, and one that is cognitively of a “higher” level, involved in a large variety of acts and behaviors characteristic of a rational and moral agent – such as a human being.

How are these two levels connected? It seems to me that contemporary phenomenology lacks *a general theory of emotional sensibility*, which would somehow serve to connect *the embodied mind* and *the rational agent* – that is, a being capable of acting for particular reasons, including even moral reasons. Emotions should be viewed as they, in fact, are: that is, as among our reasons for action. Good or bad reasons, indeed, depending on the appropriateness of the emotions in question.

By “the rational agent” I mean an agent capable of highly irrational and even destructive actions, such as those inspired by hatred, racism, fundamentalism, or some political passion. Only rational agents – that is, persons – act based on value-judgments, albeit deeply misguided ones. No non-rational agent – such as a dog or a dolphin – is capable of such deliberate crimes as the destruction of Palmyra.

Yet, although the relationship between emotions and values is much discussed in analytic philosophy, contemporary research seems to be lacking a general theory of emotional sensibility, connecting emotional experience, value judgments, and rational or irrational action.

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<sup>1</sup> M. SCHELER, *Reue und Wiedergeburt*, GW V.

<sup>2</sup> M. RATCLIFFE, *Feelings of Being – Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality*, Oxford 2008.

<sup>3</sup> M. SCHELER, *Über Scham und Schamgefühl*, GW X; D. ZAHAVI, *Self and Other. Exploring subjectivity, empathy, and shame*, Oxford 2015.

<sup>4</sup> E.T. GENDLIN, *A phenomenology of emotions: Anger*, in D. CARR & E.S. CASEY (edd.), *Explorations in phenomenology: Papers of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, The Hague 1973, 367-398; R. DE MONTICELLI, *The «raisons du cœur». Dante’s Hell and the phenomenology of a strange passion*, «Psychopathology», monogr. issue «Anger and Fury from History to Psychopathology» (2000), 171-181.

<sup>5</sup> M. SCHELER, GW V; R. DE MONTICELLI, *L’ordine del cuore – Etica e teoria del sentire*, Milano 2003.

<sup>6</sup> M. SCHELER, *Zur Rehabilitierung der Tugend*, GW III.

This paper presents an outline of such a general theory. It draws on classic sources in phenomenological literature, yet it aims to provide a somewhat independent response to some of the main questions in contemporary debates, including the crucial one concerning the objectivity/subjectivity of values and value judgments.

I mentioned two layers of emotional sensibility, a basic one shared with many living creatures and a “higher” one pertaining to the rational animal (or agent). But things are actually much more complicated. In current literature on emotional life, the word “emotion” is used both in a very broad and comprehensive way – synonymous with “emotional feeling”,<sup>7</sup> including bodily feelings and moods (pretty much like the very comprehensive sense of “passions” in Descartes, or in the classical philosophical tradition) – and in a narrower way, *emotions* as contrasted to moods and bodily feelings.

One purpose of the theory of emotional sensibility outlined here is actually to put forth a rationale for distinguishing, ordering, and connecting different phenomena of feeling that most classic and contemporary philosophical literature piles into a heap where one can find toothaches or the pleasures of the table, along with the sin of pride or the passion for truth – giving rise to what I will call the hodgepodge problem.

For we must find the rationale for a taxonomy which will allow us to *order* phenomena of such different classes as *sensory feelings* (pleasure, pain), *bodily feelings and moods* (being tired, disgusted, being anxious), *emotions of different kinds and levels* (basic: fear, anger; non-basic: shame, regret, guilt, indignation), *personal feelings or sentiments* (love and hate, esteem, respect or contempt), *passions* (jealousy, gambling addiction, passion for truth), *habitual attitudes of personality* (self-esteem, confidence, humility, curiosity...).

But since experience shows that one can suffer physical pain and nevertheless be in a state of deep joy, without being confused, we must not only classify the different types of emotional experiences, but also explain why we can simultaneously be in different states and yet distinguish them. To this end we need to consider a (vertical) dimension of depth of emotional life.

<sup>7</sup> P. GOLDIE, *The Emotions*, Oxford 2002, 51.

Finally, we know that emotional life is no simple stream of consciousness, and each state is a response of some sort to reality, motivating further states and actions and thoughts. So we must not only classify and order emotional states “vertically”, but we must also order them “horizontally” in a motivational chain connecting our emotional life.

## 2) *Value as Requiredness. A Cognitive and Practical Frame*

How is emotional sensibility related to reason, especially practical reason?

As Husserl used to say: «*Alles Leben ist Stellungnehmen*»: <sup>8</sup> living is taking a stance.

Living a human life is best characterized as responding to all sort of demands, challenges, claims, required actions or judgements, goods and evils of all sorts – in short, value-laden facts. This seems to be true all the way from the more basic affordances of the immediate physical environment up to the highest duties and commitments of adult life in our highly structured societies.

This suggests a broad and yet not too vague definition of practical reason: a capacity for *adequate* responses, where adequacy is explained *in terms of objective cognition rather than biological adaptation*.

In the emotional sphere, adequacy amounts to appropriateness and proportionality of emotional responses to values one is presented with, through emotional experience. Appropriateness and proportionality are a kind of epistemic adequacy: they are to emotional feeling what veridicality is to sensory perception. A fundamental claim of the axiological cognitivism typical of phenomenology is that such epistemic adequacy does exist, conditions for which however can be more or less fulfilled by our fallible sensibility.

Yet responses are not only epistemically, but also practically adequate or not. An action or an activity is practically adequate if it is *objectively or truly required* by a value-laden fact. Requiredness is a kind of motivational power, namely a *desire-independent motivational power*, similar to a duty – it is what something requires us to do on the ground of the value it exemplifies or violates. For example, a reversed

<sup>8</sup> E. HUSSERL, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, in *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1911-1921), *Husserliana XXV*, ed. by T. NENON and H. R. SEPP. The Hague 1986, 3-62, 56.

chair “requires” to be set aright, high mountains “demand” silence, a crime “requires” to be sanctioned. In other words, practical adequacy is grounded in epistemic adequacy: value is to sensibility what requiredness is to agency. As Wolfgang Köhler puts it:

Let us for the moment give the name *value* to this common trait of intrinsic requiredness or wrongness, and let us call *insight* all awareness of such intellectual, moral or aesthetic value. We can then say that value and corresponding insight constitute the very essence of human mental life.<sup>9</sup>

### 3) *Toward a Theory of Emotional Sensibility: Some Principles*

Let’s first state three basic claims or principles that constitute the very foundation of a phenomenologically acceptable theory of emotional sensibility:

1. Emotional experience in all its parts (including its conative aspects, drives, desires etc.) is founded on emotional sensibility, or feeling.
2. Feeling is essentially perception of the value-qualities, whether positive or negative, of things.
3. Emotional sensibility has a structure of layers (“stratification”), corresponding to an objective hierarchy of value-spheres.

#### 3.1) *Sensibility as a Foundation of Emotional Life*

Let’s discuss our first claim: affective experience is founded on *sensibility*.

This principle pinpoints *the foundational role of feeling in the complexity of emotional life*, and yields the rationale for a unified theory of emotional sensibility. In one way or another, feeling represents the basis of all emotional life, but emotional life is certainly not reducible to feeling alone – feeling serves as the primary, non-reducible mode of *reception*.

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<sup>9</sup> W. KÖHLER, *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* (1938), New York (1966), 16. A quick historical reminder is in order here: “requiredness” is indeed an awkward translation that Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler found for German terms like *Forderung*, *Aufforderung*, all of which allow us to see value qualities as guidelines for agents embedded in an appropriate environment, such as the social lifeworld in the human case. Herbert Spiegelberg preferred the word *claim*, and James. J. Gibson introduced the famous neologism *affordance*.

This can be seen using an example from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: Pierre's sudden realization that he is in love with Natasha («at that moment Pierre involuntarily betrayed to her, to Princess Mary, and above all to himself, a secret of which he himself had been unaware») and the explosion of inner and outer life unleashed by this discovery – joyful flushing, painful distress, confused speech, new perceptions, new questions, new thoughts and behaviours...<sup>10</sup>

Sensibility serves as the foundation for the rest of emotional life, in the precise sense that it *motivates everything in this life which is not mere reception, but includes response and spontaneity*. In the end, feeling motivates desire, volition and action. But first of all feeling forms the core of all sorts of emotional states.

Foundation, in our use of the word, entails a relation of *ontological dependence*. That the receptive component provides the foundation for the conative one means, first of all, that the latter cannot be without the former, but the former can exist without the latter. There are lots of examples of this second possibility: aesthetic experience, such as listening to music and recognizing its aesthetic and expressive qualities; a mother lovingly contemplating her sleeping child; blissfulness; calm despair; surprise; amazement.

Thereby we place the emphasis on *receptivity* as the fundamental aspect of emotion (in the broad sense). Contrary to most classic and contemporary approaches, the conative aspect (drives, desires) is founded, not founding. Let's clarify the point of emphasizing receptivity.

In fact, two “moments” are apparent in most emotional phenomena:

(a) *Being affected by* or receptivity, “passivity”, being “struck” or “impressed” by something: in short, the *receptive component* of an emotional episode, a kind of perception.

(b) *Being inclined to*, “moving” to or from, drives/desires, (*Streben*) or in short the *conative component*, the urge to action.

There have been two main trends in the analysis of emotional life.

Either the intentionality and somehow cognitive character of emotions has been acknowledged, but in this case emotions have been “over-intellectualized”: that is, cognition has been attributed to a belief component (as in Aristotle, or Davidson).

<sup>10</sup> P. GOLDIE, *The Emotions...*, 15.

Or emotions have been thought of as irreducible to anything else, but then they have been typically characterized as “irrational”, “non-cognitive”, “purely subjective” (as according to Hume and Kant) or at most as having a functional role for survival (vital utility - as in Descartes, but also Damasio and others).

Yet we do distinguish appropriateness and proportionality of emotional responses from the opposite features. We do recognize sensibility as a positive quality of a rational and moral agent. We do distinguish “being sensible” from “being emotional”. We do regard sensibility as an indispensable component of moral (and, of course, aesthetic) understanding. What would a moral agent incapable of respect, compassion, regret, guilt, wonder, or admiration be like?

We do recognize appropriateness and proportionality or the opposite features in emotional states and dispositions, which means, as Husserl would have it: any emotional state is “under the jurisdiction of reason”, exactly like any perceptual state, or indeed any other mental state which can be judged right or wrong in some sense.

Claim 1 (about the foundation of emotional experience on emotional sensibility) explains right and wrong in terms of epistemic adequacy. It identifies the feeling component of any emotional episode as the bearer of epistemic adequacy – or its opposite feature. One can feel right or wrong, exactly as one can perceive correctly or not.

### 3.2) *Feeling as Perception of Value-Qualities*

My second claim concerns the specific character of feeling’s intentionality. Feeling is the *mode of presence* of the value-qualities of things (salience, “affordances” in J.J. Gibson’s terminology,<sup>11</sup> tertiary qualities of all sorts).

This claim addresses the question of the formal object of emotional intentionality. It answers the question: what is it that emotional cognition is cognition of?

The answer – all of the value-qualities of things – opens up the do-

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<sup>11</sup> J.J. GIBSON, *The senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, Boston 1966: «I have coined this word as a substitute for *values*, a term which carries an old burden of philosophical meaning. I mean simply what things furnish, for good or ill. What they *afford* the observer, after all, depends on their properties». Quoted in K.S. JONES, *What is an affordance?*, «Ecological Psychology», 15/2 (2003), 111.

main of material axiology. Value-qualities have a given content of their own, irreducible to any other (perceptual or conceptual) content.

It points to a philosophically widely neglected, yet pervasive feature of the lifeworld: the plurality, richness and variety of positive or negative value qualities “colouring” things, events, states of affairs, situations in the surrounding world. Indeed it is hard to find qualifying words in our languages, adjectives, which do not refer to some value quality. Axiology is in a sense the ontology of adjectival language.

Evidence for this claim is both semantic and phenomenological. In fact, we are presented with an extremely rich variety of apparent value-qualities by means of *feeling*. I feel the unpleasantness of a sting, the bodily or psychological discomfort associated with a state of illness or weariness, the agreeable nature of an arrangement of colors. But I also sense the nobility of a gesture, the vulgarity of an attitude, the wickedness of an act, the beauty of a masterpiece. Positive qualities somehow give joy, negative ones are depressing. The harmonious way a tool or a piece of furniture fits one’s body, the pleasant form of a teapot, these are among the “affordances” of an object. These qualities too are somehow “perceived”: feeling is the appropriate mode for this kind of perception. Emotion is in this respect essentially *like* perception: it is, as the German language has it, a *Wertnehmen*. The functional and aesthetic qualities of artifacts are not only “seen”: they are felt.

This feeling is always accompanied by the exercise of other functions, both sensory and otherwise. From a phenomenological perspective, different sorts of states – sensory perceptions, memories, experiences of empathy or social cognition, understood speech acts, etc. – *motivate* a feeling, and further acts – new perceptions, speech acts, choices, actions etc. – are in turn *motivated by* such a feeling.

### 3.3) *Structure and Layers of Sensibility*

In order to clarify our third claim we must first consider a further dimension of feeling’s intentionality. Thus far we have considered one: the *breadth* of its domain, or horizon. The qualities of value – positive and negative to varying degrees – are *many*. The extraordinary *richness* of the negative or positive value qualities to which we are sensitive provides a basic starting point for any phenomenological reflection on feeling. There is virtually no situation in life in which some of these

qualities are not present. I walk along the road, and the atmospheric conditions present me with an environment which is pleasurable to a greater or lesser extent; the urban architecture gives me aesthetic pleasure or pain – or something in between – with every step; the beggar on the corner draws my attention to the horrors of poverty; in words and images the newsstands scream violence and beauty, ferocity and injustice; every event along my way, whether serious or trivial, manifests qualities of value from some point of view: aesthetic, ethical, legal, economic, ecological, ergonomic, hygienic, gastronomic... Viewed *a parte subiecti*, this axiological richness of the world is made up by all values that affect us, touch us and move us, physically or emotionally.

But there is another familiar aspect of value-experience: its depth, or *the way in which different values touch us* – more or less deeply or intimately.

It makes sense to wonder how *deeply* we are affected by a quality of value, positive or negative – the ugliness of a pair of shoes on a friend's feet, or an offensive gesture towards us. We also speak of a difference in *importance or weight* that things have. We are usually willing to distinguish the importance or weight that things have in themselves from their importance or weight for us under specific circumstances. For example, if it is important to me that my friend make a good impression on someone in a position to help him, his ugly shoes may disturb me more than a verbal insult he may direct at me – even if I continue to think that how one dresses is less important than kind behavior.

The difference in “objective” importance which we all recognize both in general and in many specific cases (killing is more serious than insulting; destroying ancient sculptures worse than scrawling graffiti on a supermarket wall; giving one's time or one's life for a friend is more beautiful than giving her money for medical treatment) may be called *the rank of a value*.

Is this language of depth and rank more than metaphorical? Our third claim maintains that it is, that it does refer to an amazing kind of correspondence between the organization of our emotional experience and the structures of axiological meaning that any actual manifestation of goods and evils exemplifies in a given situation. Let's recall our principle:

(3) Sensibility has a structure of layers (“stratification”), corresponding (or claiming to correspond) to an objective hierarchy of value-spheres.

Let’s first try to spell out its content more precisely, starting from the second term of the alleged correspondence: *an objective hierarchy of value-spheres*.

### 3.3.1) *An Objective Ordering of Value Spheres?*

Is there any such hierarchy?

That there is one is of course the most controversial premise of our theory, this premise being subject to objections raised by axiological relativisms and culturalisms of all sorts. Hence the importance of focusing on the content of this premise in order to see what it actually claims and what it does not. One useful approach involves the faithful description of a relevant feature of our value experience, as attempted above: all of the positive value-qualities we feel are present in things and that make them things we consider good or that are lacking and therefore “required”; and all of the negative value-qualities we feel that make the things they touch things we regard as evils – *these various value-qualities are not felt as having the same rank*. They seem to belong to *very different value spheres*, and *these value spheres are somehow hierarchically ordered*.

So, what does this premise say exactly?

(I) It does not say that there is a complete, objective ordering of values, but of their *types* – thus there is an ordering of value spheres.

(II) It does not say that such a hierarchy is universally acknowledged or accepted, but only that:

- a) Such a hierarchy emerges throughout human history and during its most dramatic conflicts in the form of an *ordering of (spheres of) intrinsic value* (making a good an end in itself) which (spheres of) instrumental values are subservient to. From ancient Greek civilization to the most intimate core of religious experience of any faith, up to the tragedies of the contemporary world, an order-

ing seems to emerge, however countered or challenged again and again, placing the values of personal flourishing (dignity) above those of the prepersonal spheres, namely the vital and the social spheres – thus the values of the prepersonal spheres should be subservient to those of personal flourishing. To the vital sphere belong the values of life-enhancement, instrumental to personal flourishing, such as the satisfaction of all basic needs, health, good living conditions; to the social sphere belong all the values embodied by the institutions and good practices of a society – welfare, security, education, good administration, well-functioning economic life, and technical improvements in all fields – without which most people can have no chance of personal flourishing. But all this, such is the implication, should be the means or provide the conditions for realizing those values which bestow meaning to (all) personal lives: justice in matters of law and rights, beauty in nature and art, knowledge and joy in the quest for knowledge in all domains of science and morality.

- b) Nor does our premise imply that axiological truths within each sphere are universally acknowledged or accepted: but only that there are axiological discoveries much as there are scientific discoveries. Take justice as an example. There has been remarkable progress in our understanding – in our theories of justice – from the time of the ancient Greeks to, say, the age of human rights. Our understanding increases through dramatic historical experience.
- c) Once this understanding becomes widespread, not complying with it becomes indefensible. Today, one cannot openly support slavery or sexual discrimination. Even if there still are countless cases of human rights violations, the perpetrators don't usually claim to be doing the right thing – they would rather somehow attempt to blame their victims.
- d) The objective hierarchy theory does allow for a distinction between the importance or weight that things have in themselves, and the importance or weight that they have for us under specific circumstances.

It's impossible to argue convincingly for this part of our theory within the limited space of this paper; it is however important to have an intuitive grasp of it in order more precisely to understand the content of claim (3). Nevertheless, despite objections from more sceptical mainstream or axiologically relativistic perspectives, there is additional evidence supporting our approach.

We do distinguish levels of gravity or importance in value-laden facts. The gravity of being deprived of an ice cream feels inferior to that of being raped. The importance of one's health is felt to be greater than that of a variety of pleasurable habits, e.g. smoking. And it's quite understandable that one may disregard gastronomic pleasures and even health for the sake of scientific or philosophical research...

### 3.3.2) *Why a "Stratified" Structure of Sensibility?*

Let's now address the first term of the alleged correspondence: the structure of layers ("stratification") that sensibility is supposed to have.

What problem is this claim trying to address? We already mentioned it: the hodgepodge problem. A satisfactory theory of feeling should avoid lumping all emotional phenomena together. Indeed, this claim is a kind of structural or Gestalt principle for emotional life, parallel to the analogous principle phenomenologists have put forward regarding perceptual experience.<sup>12</sup>

Our emotional life is not at all chaotic, nor is it an unstructured flow of "states".

Against flow theories, we can point to motivational chains which are "rational" (or irrational, in any event, not simply causal). Having a sentiment of friendship for you motivates my joy at your coming in and my desire to get up and hug you – whose satisfaction I can choose to postpone because I'm in the middle of giving a lecture. (This power to endorse or reject motivations, thereby making them efficacious or powerless, distinguishes the motivational series from a causal series).

But against hodgepodge theories, we may put forward our principle of vertical structure, or Gestalt. Here, Max Scheler offers us the clearest description:

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<sup>12</sup> R. DE MONTICELLI, *Requiredness. An argument for Value Realism*, «Phenomenology and Mind», 5 (2013), 84-97.

There can be no doubt that the facts which are designated in such a finely differentiated language as German by “bliss”, “blissfulness” [*Glückseligkeit*], “being happy” [*Glücklichsein*], “serenity” [*Heiterkeit*], “cheerfulness” [*Fröhlichkeit*], and feelings of “comfort” [*Wohlgefühl*], “pleasure”, and “agreeableness” [*sinnliche Lust und Annehmlichkeit*] are not simply similar types of emotional facts which differ only in terms of their intensities...<sup>13</sup>

All these feelings share a positive quality; but – Scheler says – they do not necessarily differ only in intensity. They can also differ – as one would say in ordinary language – in depth. What do we mean by that?

Intuitively, we realize that a feeling can touch a person more or less “deeply”, depending on *the degree of personal involvement*. For instance, the pleasure of a good ice cream satisfies my particular personality much less than the joy of understanding Plato. No doubt this joy will have *a higher degree of motivational power* than the pleasure of an ice cream: it might indeed motivate my choice to study philosophy instead of something else, with serious consequences for the rest of my professional life...

These two notions help to explain the metaphor in conceptual terms. But is it possible to give, if not a metric for depth, at least a rationale for the alleged ordering of the layers of sensibility concerned, respectively, by the pleasure of ice cream and the joy of reading Plato? What is the rationale for this ordering?

A final passage from Scheler offers a powerful suggestion:

«It is, for example, impossible for one to be “blissful” over happenings of *the same axiological level* that are “disagreeable” to another; the differences in these feelings also seem somehow to require *different axiological states of affairs*».<sup>14</sup>

Here is the explanation. The “depth” of a feeling is proportional to the importance of the values concerned. Feelings are modes of presence of values *at different levels*.

<sup>13</sup> M. SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, Engl. Transl. by M. Frings and R.L. Funk, Noyes St. Evanston 1973, 330.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 331, emphasis added.

### 3.3.3) *Sentiments and value-preferences*

We will now conclude our analysis of the third principle of a phenomenological theory of feeling, which, needless to say, could benefit from further investigation. Nevertheless, even in this context, the principle manages to add quite a bit to our theory. First of all it reveals a new feature of value-experience: we do often *feel* some kind of ordering of values, before and independently of an act of propositional judgment: a value quality presents itself to us in the form of a perceived priority, which we (fallibly) feel to be an objective one. We feel that some things that are good are more valuable than others, even when we decide that in a particular situation we will *give* priority to the less valuable. This feeling of an objective priority can be as illusory as any other feeling but is equally open to correction through further experience. A value preference is an act of feeling (hence reception) before it can motivate volition. True, a *felt* priority – a structure of preference – is not always apparent (otherwise no decision could ever become a dilemma), and even when it is apparent, it requires a kind of endorsement on the subject's part. This is typically the case with all the feelings which involve “a [small] background hierarchy”, and a consequent “yes” or “no”: for example, loving this particular person means feeling these specific value qualities to be more important than certain others. The same is true of admiration, contempt, sympathy, religious devotion, political passions...

Those feelings which involve such consent (or dissent) might be called *sentiments*.

We can already see from the above examples that our third principle allows us to introduce an important explanatory tool, which seems to be missing from most theories of emotions: the notion of a *sentiment* explains the difference between the “primary” emotions – (that we share with many other animals) such as fear, anger, sexual drive, intraspecific affections or hostilities etc. – and “secondary” or more refined emotions, typically human. Let's consider a simple example. Young children don't seem to experience the emotion of shame, not even relative to the very different cultural norms which exist in different places and times. It is only when they are mature enough to implicitly consent to a new “small value hierarchy” involving a personal disposition to act,

perceive, judge in new ways – in short, when they acquire the *sentiment of shame* – that they become capable, given the right circumstances, of blushing with shame, that is of experiencing the appropriate *emotion* (in the narrow sense). The German language makes things clearer by, in this case, distinguishing *Schamgefühl* (as a sentiment, *pudeur* in French) from *Scham* (as a secondary emotion, *honte* in French).

This principle also has further benefits:

a) it completes the description of feeling’s intentionality: the depth of a feeling should be proportional to the perceived importance of its value-level.

b) it thereby explains the rationality of emotions: spelling out what is required for a feeling experience to be adequate, that is appropriate and not disproportionate.

We can easily see why despair over a cancelled flight (in most, yet not all, cases) is disproportionate; or why to be like Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official whom Hannah Arendt chose as a paradigm of the “banality of evil”, is to have horribly inappropriate feeling responses to states of affairs of extreme moral gravity. In fact, in the Jerusalem trial documents, it is frequently noted that he regarded the murder of thousands of innocent victims as something “disagreeable” (like a bad meal).

#### 4) *Sensibility and Selfhood*

We learn about human emotional life – and value-experience – much more from interpersonal relations and literature than from handbooks of psychology, and this seems to be even more the case for emotion than for any other kind of mental state. Why?

Any phenomenologist would answer: emotional phenomena are not independent of personhood and individual personality, because they are *constitutive* of both. They are individuating and individuated! Or, in the richness of their contents and implications, they cannot be separated from the experiencing person (as opposed to mathematical discoveries, or even philosophical *thoughts*, that, as Frege used to say, “have no master”). That’s why we seek to understand different types of ill-fated love, perhaps, by reading Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary (that is,

in the context of a personal narrative, as many would say), much more than by studying academic psychology.

Yet this might seem a kind of begging the question. Can't we give a more precise explanation?

We can. We said that our third principle was a sort of Gestalt principle for emotional life. We saw how a vertical structuring of felt preferences works to ground the appropriateness and proportionality of emotions (or lack thereof). But wherever there is a form of Gestalt as an organizing principle of some domain of pieces of data, we must *look for the whole which integrates those pieces of data* – a whole which is not reducible to a mere sum of its parts – if such a Gestalt is to hold.<sup>15</sup>

Our question, then, becomes: What is the “whole” of which feelings are the parts or “moments”?

Our answer is, not surprisingly: the Self.

By “the Self” I mean a person, *as she experiences herself, or as she is “given to herself”*, in that quite peculiar, irreducible way, in which anybody is not given to anybody else – that is, from a first person perspective.<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, layers of sensibility *simply are layers of Self, as they are experienced from within*.

This explains the connection, already referenced (section 3.3.2.), between the depth or importance of a layer of sensibility and the *degree of personal involvement*.

Life and science teach us the role feeling exerts in shaping personality. A person who is emotionally wounded is a person wounded in her deepest self. Or think of poor Phineas Gage, the construction foreman from Vermont who suffered major brain damage in a work accident, whose case is described by Antonio Damasio in his highly successful book *Descartes' Error* (1994). After recovering from the accident, he “was no longer Gage”. It seems the psychological functions (or the parts of the brain) affected by the accident were exactly those that are indispensable for the modulated exercise of feeling.

Does our theory provide us with criteria for *ordering* a taxonomy of feelings as discussed in section 1? Well, it does at least suggest an in-

<sup>15</sup> R. DE MONTICELLI, *Requiredness. An argument...*

<sup>16</sup> L. RUDDER BAKER, *Naturalism and the First-Person Perspective*, Oxford 2013.

tuitive direction of deeper and deeper self-awareness, or rather *experience* of oneself. From the surface of one's body to one's "intimate" self.

Not all feeling experiences, indeed, come to be felt from inside as "really" concerning oneself – one's deepest self, so to speak. Our theory suggests that *there is a specific layer of sensibility constituting individual personality*. Call it the layer of sentiments, or the value-preferences ordering layer. If our theory is to be believed, this is the very central, or most intimate, layer of selfhood. Call it the core-self: it is what ordinary language still refers to as a person's "soul".

Arguing this last claim in detail would require a further article, if not a whole book. A kind of map of the areas to be explored is outlined below in this trial picture of sensibility and selfhood, as a theory of stratification would describe it – which will bring this paper to an (open) conclusion.

#### *5) Self from Surface to Depth: a Provisional Schema*

This schema summarizes the proposed taxonomy of feeling experiences by employing an ordering principle in which the layer of sensibility involved in each (type of) experience corresponds to the layer of (one)self that the same experience "reveals." The increasing role that each (type of) feeling plays in personal life (its motivating power, its relative degree of personal involvement) explains the deeper and deeper self-revealing power which that feeling experience possesses. Examples of each class in this taxonomy of feelings should make the series of correspondences more intuitively clear.

SELF FROM SURFACE TO DEPTH.  
THE STRATIFICATION THEORY OF SENSIBILITY  
AND SELFHOOD: A PROVISIONAL SCHEMA

<b>Examples</b>	<b>Layers of Sensibility</b>	<b>Experienced Layers of Self</b>	<b>Role in Personal Life</b>	<b>Value Spheres</b>
Enjoying a massage	Affective sensations	Parts of one's body	Foundations of (pre-reflective) self-consciousness	Sensory values (pleasant/painful) Affordances
Hunger, fatigue	Bodily feelings	One's body (globally felt)	Indicators of one's vital or existential needs	Vital values Life enhancing or impairing
Anxiety, depression	Moods	One's global state ( <i>How</i> are you?)		Socially implemented: Utility sphere → Welfare Instrumental to Culture and Civilization Spheres
Fear; anger; Basic desires and drives	Basic emotions	One's sudden changes of global state + conative component	Motivating pre-personal behaviour	
Esteem; <i>Schamgefühl</i>	Sentiments/ Habitual Dispositions of Sensibility	One's dispositions involving value preferences (Who are you?)	Indicators of personality	Values defining Cultures and their normative structures: Justice à Public Institutions Beauty → Art and Culture (Search for) Truth → Science, Education

Admiration; <i>Scham</i>	Higher emotions	Actual life of the above dispositions, possibly involving conations	Motivating personal behaviour	Manifesting Personal Axiological Orders of Priority and Preference
<i>Ressentiment (Resentment);</i> Passion for truth	Passions	Sentiment-based habitual dispositions of the will	Enacting personality in the real world	Implementing positive and negative Values in all kinds of Goods and Evils

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological approach to emotions emphasizes the fundamental importance of the realm of feeling in both the cognitive and practical exercise of reason. It outlines a general theory of feeling, which exploits a classical phenomenological analysis of emotional intentionality as the mode of presence and experience of values to provide a taxonomy of emotional states and acts. It also aims to connect the two levels of affective sensibility apparently concerned: one that is basically embodied, and one that is cognitively of a “higher” level, involved in a large variety of acts and behaviors characteristic of a rational and moral agent – such as a human being.

