VALUES AND EMOTIONS:  
NEO-SENTIMENTALISM’S PROSPECTS*  
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Abstract

Neo-sentimentalism is the view that to judge that something has an evaluative property is to judge that some affective or emotional response is appropriate with respect to it. The difficulty in assessing neo-sentimentalism is that it allows for radically different versions. My aim is to spell out what I take to be its most plausible version. I distinguish between a normative version, which takes the concept of appropriateness to be normative, and a descriptive version, which claims that appropriateness in emotions is a matter of correspondence to evaluative facts. I argue that the latter version can satisfy the normativity requirement that follows from Moore’s Open Question Argument, that it is superior to the former with respect to the explanatory role of values, and with respect to the Wrong Kind of Reason Objection. Finally, I argue that the circularity that is involved is not vicious: understood epistemically, neo-sentimentalism remains instructive.

Introduction

Neo-sentimentalism is the view, roughly, that to judge that something has an evaluative property is to judge that some emotional response is fitting or appropriate with respect to it. Such an account of value concepts, sometimes also called fitting-attitude analyses, has made a recent come-back.  

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1 Neo-sentimentalism can be traced back to Clarke (1706); Hutcheson (1725); Hume (1740); Brentano (1889); Husserl (1988); Scheler (1913-6); and Meinong (1917). More recently, versions of it have been advocated by Broad (1930); Brandt (1946); Ewing (1947, 1959); Wiggins (1976, 1987); Chisholm (1981, 1986); Falk (1986); McDowell (1985); Blackburn (1984, 1998); Gibbard (1990); Lemos (1994); Tappolet (1995, 2000); Anderson (1993); Mulligan (1998); Sainsbury (1998); Scanlon (1998); Skorupski (2000); D’Arms and
Part of the plausibility of neo-sentimentalism is due to the fact that it is difficult to deny that values and emotional responses, or at least that their concepts, are closely related. It is quite obvious that concepts such as admirable or disgusting are interconnected with the concepts of emotions, such as admiration and disgust. As has been often noted, the main attraction of this approach is that it promises to account for two features of evaluative judgements that are notoriously difficult to combine: their action-guidingness and their cognitive character (Darwall, Gibbard and Railton 1992; D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a). Though neo-sentimentalism need not be committed to internalism, it promises to explain the tight connection between evaluative judgement and action, in so far as the invoked responses are related to motivations. It would account for the cognitive character of evaluative judgements because such judgements would be truth-assessable and could possibly be known to be true or false. Moreover, in so far as the responses at stake can be grounded on reasons, neo-sentimentalism would also make room for the intuition that evaluative judgements are sensitive to reasons (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a). According to many, neo-sentimentalism would have still another virtue: it would involve no ontological commitment to independent values (Brentano 1889: 60).

The difficulty in assessing neo-sentimentalism is that it allows for a great many different versions. My aim here is to spell out what I take to be its most plausible version and to try and defend it by comparing it to what I take to be its main contender. In the first section, I lay out the main varieties of neo-sentimentalism and argue that one has to distinguish between a normative and a descriptive version. In the next section, I consider the main argument that can be given in favour of the normative version and show that the

Jacobson (2000a; 2000b); Zimmerman (2001); Helm (2001); Oddie (2005); Danielsson and Olson (2007);
descriptive version is far from excluded by this argument. After this, I offer two arguments in favour of the descriptive version. The first one turns on the question of normative action explanation, while the second develops the Wrong Kind of Reason Argument. I end with a discussion of the accusation that the kind of account I favour involves vicious circularity.

Before I start, I should say that I will consider only judgements that involve concepts such as admirable, disgusting, shameful and frightening. These concepts are a kind of thick evaluative concepts, which can be called “affective concepts”. These are the best candidates for neo-sentimentalism, for they wear their response-dependence on their sleeves, to use David Wiggins’ expression (Wiggins 1987). More general evaluative concepts, such as good or bad, are likely to admit a neo-sentimentalist treatment as well, but given that they share many features with determinable concepts, such as coloured, the story is bound to be more complicated.

1) Two versions of neo-sentimentalism

According to neo-sentimentalism, evaluative concepts such as admirable and disgusting are response-dependent, in the sense that they are related to the concepts of specific responses – admiration and disgust in this case. Something counts as admirable if and only if admiration is an appropriate or fitting attitude, where this is taken to be a conceptual truth. More generally, the relation between evaluative concepts and the corresponding responses


For such concepts, see Anderson 1993; and Tappolet 2003. And see D’Arms and Jacobson 2003 for the claim that those concepts are the best candidates for neo-sentimentalism. This is also Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen’s way of framing FA-analyses (2004: 402).

For the claim that good is a determinable, see Mulligan ms, Tappolet 2004, and Oddie 2005.

Some, like Wright (1992) and Johnston (2001) only consider dispositional or projective accounts to be response-dependent. For a more liberal take on response-dependence see D’Arms and Jacobson (2000a, fn. 20).
can be spelled out as follows (where V is an affective value and E the corresponding attitude):

\[(NS) \ x \ is \ V \ if \ and \ only \ if \ x \ is \ such \ that \ feeling \ E \ is \ appropriate \ in \ response \ to \ x.\]  

A question that is crucial for understanding neo-sentimentalism is that of knowing what it is for a response to be appropriate. To start with, however, let me briefly address the question of what kind of states are involved. Neo-sentimentalists all agree that the responses in question are affective, in contrast with judgements, beliefs or types of actions. Neo-sentimentalist accounts thus form a sub-class of fitting-attitude analyses. Even so, concentrating on affective responses leaves many possibilities open – one could think of “occurrent, object-laden, affect-laden mental states” (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a: 723), but also of emotional dispositions (Prinz 2007), for instance. When affective concepts are considered, the corresponding responses clearly include states such as disgust, admiration, and fear. Since these are paradigmatic cases of emotions, it makes sense to claim that the unitary type of response at play in neo-sentimentalism is emotion.

There are two main ways to understand the concept of appropriateness at stake. The first, which is now standard, is to take this concept to be normative.\(^6\) An appropriate

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\(^5\) One might want to require that the response is only appropriate if one were to contemplate x, and also that the intrinsic features of x be properly grasped (Chisholm 1981; 1986; Lemos 1994; Zimmerman 2001; Bykvist 2009).

\(^6\) “Normative” is used in its narrow sense, which is equivalent to “deontic” and excludes the evaluative. If one takes the normative to encompass both the deontic and the evaluative, this would make for two sub-possibilities, one of which being that appropriate is evaluative (see Williams 1971). Given the circularity that would be involved, this might not seem a very tempting suggestion.
emotion is one that satisfies a normative requirement; the emotion ought to be felt, in some sense of *ought*.

More precisely, we would have the following claim:

$$(\text{NS-normative}) \ x \text{ is } V \text{ if and only if } x \text{ is such that feeling } E \text{ is required with respect to } x.$$  

An alternative conception, which has been left mostly unexplored, consists in denying that the concept of appropriateness at stake is normative. There are different ways of spelling out this idea. The suggestion that I would like to make is that the appropriateness of emotions is a matter of representing things as they are. In the relevant sense, appropriate emotions are emotions that are correct from an epistemic point of view.

$$(\text{NS-descriptive}) \ x \text{ is } V \text{ if and only if } x \text{ is such that feeling } E \text{ is correct in response to } x.$$  

The claim is that something is disgusting just if feeling disgust towards this thing were correct from an epistemic point of view – it would represent the thing as it is, evaluatively speaking.

This suggestion is grounded on an account of emotions, which underlines the numerous analogies between emotions and perceptual experiences. According to the so-

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7 One could also say that the attitude is one that there is reason to have, where the concept of reason is taken to be normative. See Scanlon 1998: 95; Skorupski 2000; and Anderson 1993.

8 The terminology is inspired by Brentano, who claimed that something is good if and only if loving it is correct (“richtig”) (1889). Another possibility is to claim that being appropriate for an emotion is for it to be justified, while this is not taken to be a normative claim (Mulligan 1998). The problem with this suggestion is that it is not clear that it can satisfy the Normativity Requirement (see next section).

9 This suggestion is close to Danielsson and Olson’s claim that $x$ is good means that $x$ has properties that provide content-reasons to favour $x$, where content-reasons for an attitude are reasons for the correctness of the attitude, a notion which they claim is analogous to truth (2007). One difference between our accounts is
called Perceptual Account, emotions are a kind of perception: they represent their objects in
certain ways.\(^\text{10}\) What is specific about emotions is that they represent things as having
certain evaluative properties. To use the medieval jargon Anthony Kenny favoured (1963),
the emotions’ \textit{formal objects} are evaluative properties.\(^\text{11}\) Thus, an emotion of admiration
with respect to a friend will be correct just in case the friend is really admirable.

This account differs from the normative version of neo-sentimentalism, for at least
according to a plausible interpretation to say that an emotion is correct is not yet to make a
normative judgement. It simply amounts to saying that such an emotion is one that
corresponds to how things are evaluatively speaking. For instance, amusement is correct
just if its object is amusing. And this is not, arguably, a normative claim.\(^\text{12}\)

It might help to compare appropriateness with truth. At least according to a number
of important conceptions of truth – correspondence theories, deflationary theories and
possibly coherentist theories – to say that a proposition is true is to make a cognitive
assessment, but it is not, as such, to make a normative judgement. In particular, it would not
amount to saying that the proposition is good in a way, or that it is required. As such, that a

\(^{10}\) This account goes back to the moral sense theorists Shaftesbury (1711), Hutcheson (1738) and arguably
Hume (1740) and to the turn-of-the-century philosophers Scheler (1913-6) and Meinong (1917). More
recently, see McDowell 1985; Wiggins 1987; de Sousa 1987 and 2002; Tappolet 1995, 2000, forth.; D’Arms
and Jacobson 2000a and 2000b; Johnston 2001; Wedgwood 1994, 2001; and Prinz 2004, 2006; Deonna 2006;

\(^{11}\) According to Kenny, the formal object of a state is the object under that description which must apply to it
if it is possible to be in this state with respect to it (1963: 132). He claims that the description of the formal
object of an emotion involves a reference to belief: one has to believe that something is dangerous in order to
feel fear. In recent times, however, it has become common to claim that the formal object of an emotion is a
property. Thus, de Sousa claims that “The formal object of fear – the norm defined by fear for its own
appropriateness – is the Dangerous.” (2002: 251) I shall leave aside the fact that the intensity of the emotion
has to fit the degree of the value in question. See Broad 1954: 293; Tappolet 2000; D’Arms and Jacobson
2000b; and Jones 2004.
proposition corresponds to the facts, for instance, is certainly not a normative fact in itself. It is only in so far as truth is our goal that requirements follow. One might object that truth is a goal that is constitutive of belief, so that normative requirements follow necessarily from the claim that a belief is true. This might well be so. But the suggestion that truth is the constitutive goal of belief can be understood as the claim that truth is a good at which beliefs necessarily aim. So, having a true belief would amount to having a belief that meets the requirements set by the constitutive goal of that kind of state. It is a belief that has met its success conditions. However, this claim does not entail that that *true* itself is an evaluative or a normative concept (Horwich 2000).

In the same way, it might well be true that correct representation is a constitutive goal of emotions. This goal would ground epistemic norms pertaining to emotions, such as the norm that, all things being equal, we ought to have correct emotions. Given these norms, it would be a good thing for an emotion to be correct; a correct emotion would be one that happens to satisfy the relevant epistemic norms. But this does not entail that *correct* is a normative concept. If you are looking for a tall person, Anna, who happens to be tall, meets your requirement, but this does not mean that ‘tall’ is itself a normative term.

As I formulated it, both versions of neo-sentimentalism are claims about value concepts. However, they are naturally taken to go hand in hand with ontological claims. In contrast with NS-descriptive, NS-normative is naturally taken to aim at ontological simplification: it purports to explain evaluative judgements in terms of norms that apply to

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12 The difference between this account and D’Arms and Jacobson’s is possibly quite small. They readily embrace the presentation jargon I favour. Thus, they claim that “[e]motions present things to us as having certain evaluative features”, where the “[...] fittingness of an emotion is like the truth of a belief.” (2000b: 72)
13 I am indebted to Justin D’Arms for reminding me of this point.
emotions. This suggests that there being a norm, of a kind to be specified, that requires us to feel shame or admiration with respect to something is what it is to be shameful or admirable. Values themselves could thus be said to be reflections or projections of required emotions. Or else, values could be claimed to be constituted by required emotions. This is quite a different account from NS-descriptive, which has no eliminative or reductive ambitions. Contrary to the NS-normative, NS-descriptive makes the normative requirements on emotions merely derivative. If we ought to have a certain emotional response with respect to something it is because it has a certain value, and it is a constitutive goal of emotions to match evaluative facts. Although it is a claim about concepts, NS-descriptive appears to be incompatible with certain kinds of anti-realism.

The choice between the two versions of neo-sentimentalism would seem to amount to choosing whether the priority should be given to norms governing emotions or to evaluative facts. While I shall examine an argument for the normative version in the next section, it is with an eye to motivating the descriptive version.

2) The Open Question Argument and the Normativity Requirement

The main argument for the claim that the concept *appropriate* as it appears in the neo-sentimentalist bi-conditional is normative consists in an application of G. E. Moore’s Open Question Argument (Wiggins, 1987: 187; Darwall, Gibbard & Railton, 1992: 116-118; D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a: 726-727). As Darwall, Gibbard and Railton explain, this argument can be read as entailing a constraint on any analysis of evaluative and normative concepts. That constraint is that the *analysans* ought to maintain the action-guidingness, or

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14 But see Wedgwood 2009: 516-7 for the claim that “fitting-attitude” equivalences are best understood as
more generally the normative force, of the *analysandum*. What is wrong with an analysis of *good* in terms of biological fitness, for instance, resides in the fact that biological fitness has no particular normative force; it does not, as such, involve any requirement on what to desire or on what to do. The question whether we ought, other things being equal, to devote ourselves to bringing about biological fitness is wide open. Similarly, it would be wrong to say that something falls under an evaluative concept just if it is such as to *cause* some particular attitude; for to judge that something causes an attitude simply lacks normative force. From this it is tempting to infer that the *analysans* should be spelled out in terms of responses that are appropriate in some normative sense. Something would be shameful, for instance, just in case shame ought to be felt with respect to it. Thus, and only thus, would the normativity of the evaluative judgement be preserved by the *analysans*. This is the train of thought that leads D’Arms and Jacobson to claim that “to think a sentiment appropriate in the relevant sense is a normative judgement, of a type yet to be explicated, in favour of feeling it.” (2000a: 729; Chisholm 1986: 53; and Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004: 391.)

No doubt that NS-normative satisfies the Normativity Requirement that follows from the open question argument. However, it would be wrong to believe that this is the only way to satisfy this requirement. NS-descriptive also satisfies it. To judge that an emotion is correct is to be committed to the claim that its object really has the corresponding evaluative property. Thus, whatever normative force the evaluative judgement has is implicitly preserved by the *analysans*. This will seem too circular an

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stating an identity relation between facts, but no conceptual asymmetry.
account for many. But as I shall argue bellow, there is reason to believe that the circularity at stake is not vicious.

While agreeing that the normative force of the evaluative judgement is preserved, one might worry about the fact that NS-descriptive does nothing to explain or elucidate the normative force of evaluative judgements. Rabinowicz and Ronnow-Rasmussen suggest that what is welcome about an account like NS-Normative is that “it removes the air of mystery from the normative ‘compellingness’ of values. There is nothing strange in the prescriptive implications of value ascriptions if value is explicated in deontic terms.” (2004: 391-392) It has to be acknowledged that NS-descriptive does not attempt to throw any light on the normative force of value ascriptions. It just takes it as given. As will become apparent in the next section, however, it is not clear that the way NS-normative attempts to explain the normativity of evaluative judgements is in fact better off.

The first argument in favour of NS-descriptive, to which I now turn, concerns the normative character of action explanation.

3) Values and normative action explanation

We have seen that NS-normative satisfies the Normativity Requirement; evaluative judgements are claimed to be judgements stating that certain emotional responses are required. As a result, NS-normative can make room for the action-guidingness of evaluative judgements, that is, for the fact that evaluative judgements involve claims about what we have reasons to do. This is so because many emotional responses are intimately connected to motivational states and actions. However, if the *analysans* preserves the action-guidingness, it is only indirectly, *via* the relation between emotions, motivational states and
action. It is only to the extent that the emotional response involves a motivational state that a requirement on a response comes with a requirement on motivation and action.\textsuperscript{15}

The problem is that this account of action-guidingness excludes what would seem to be an important kind of normative action explanations, namely explanation couched in evaluative terms instead of normative requirements on emotions. Suppose I meet a brown bear in the woods. If I ought to curl on the ground, it is because the bear is fearsome, a feature that is plausibly taken to supervene on dangerousness.\textsuperscript{16} If I ought to do this, it is not because there is a norm that requires me to feel fear, so that, given that fear involves a desire to escape what one is afraid of, and curling is the best way to do so, it follows that curling is required. The reason for curling has to do with the thing I am afraid of and its properties, and not with whatever feelings \textit{cum} motivational states are required. Indeed, it would seem that the feelings are required because the bear is fearsome.\textsuperscript{17} If some time later, when I’ve reached safety, I am asked why I curled, a natural answer would be “because there was a fearsome bear”. Though I could also reply that I was feeling fear, it would be odd if I said “I curled because fear was required and that means that a desire to act the way I did was required”. Or, to switch to another example, suppose I feel shame because I told a lie to a friend. What would have explained why I should have refrained from telling the lie is not that shame and some related desire were required. The reason that speaks against telling the lie has to do with the lie itself. Its being a shameful thing is a reason to refrain from it. The reason is not that I would violate some norm regulating my feelings.

\textsuperscript{15} See D’Arms and Jacobson 1994: 762.
\textsuperscript{16} One might want to add that this is only part of the story; on an internalist account, reasons depend on motivational states, such as a standing concern for one’s safety.
\textsuperscript{17} This is at least what a realist would reply to Euthyphro’s question. See also Johnston’s missing explanation argument (1991).
The point, it seems, is that values give us reasons to act. This is a controversial claim and I will come back to it. But in any case, there is a problem in so far as NS-normative is committed to the claim that reasons for actions are based on normative requirements on an emotional response involving a motivational state.

The problem with NS-normative appears to be of the same kind as the problem Talbot Brewer (2002) identifies in his argument against reason internalism. On such accounts, “the justificatory reason one might have to avoid cruel actions is not the fact that the actions would be cruel but rather the fact that one is disposed to count the actions as cruel.” (2002: 450) The problem is that this involves a reversal of the “direction of gaze” that is appropriate to the sound deliberative search for reasons: “When we are in search of such reasons, we generally do not and ought not to look inward at our dispositions to evaluate actions in various ways, but rather outward at the values we are disposed to find in proposed actions or their expected outcome.” (ibid.) In the same way, it would consist in a reversal of the “direction of gaze” to explain an action in terms of our emotional responses and the norms that apply to them, instead of looking to the world and its evaluative features.

The advocate of NS-normative is likely to object that her view has been misrepresented. In any case, she can reply that what grounds the requirement to feel the emotional responses is some non-evaluative, and in all likelihood, natural features of its intentional object (Scanlon 1998; Dancy 2000; Olson 2006). Thus, it would be something about the object, and not a feature of the emotional responses, that gives us reasons to have an emotional reaction involving a motivational state. One could also add that the non-evaluative features ground two different normative requirements: one bearing on the
emotion and one on action (Scanlon 1998: 95-100).\textsuperscript{18} Thus, one would avoid making normative action explanations indirect; the explanation would not take us to the action by moving from the required emotion to the motivation involved in the emotion. The fact that the bear is about to attack would both be the reason why one ought to feel fear and the reason one ought to curl into a ball.

The problem, again, is that this view excludes normative explanations in terms of values. Some, following Thomas Scanlon, will be happy with the conclusion that values do not give reasons for action.\textsuperscript{19} However, it has to be acknowledged that this view consists in an important revision of ordinary thought. We usually take it that the fact that something has such and such evaluative property is at least part of what explains why we have to do certain things. This is particularly obvious when one thinks of thick evaluative concepts such as \textit{cruel} or \textit{generous}. It is also plausible in the case of the sub-class of thick concepts I have called “affective concepts”. That an action is shameful is naturally taken to be a reason to refrain from performing it, while its being admirable can be taken to be a reason to perform it.

It might be objected that whether or not this reflects ordinary thought, the view that values gives us reason is misguided. The fact that the bear might injure and kill you gives you reasons to fear it and to curl. Does the fact that the bear is fearsome give an additional reason to fear it and to curl?\textsuperscript{20} Certainly not, it will be claimed.

The question is whether natural facts can give you reasons, or whether when we refer to a natural fact and claim that it is a reason, we tacitly refer to some evaluative facts.

\textsuperscript{18} This was suggested by Justin D’Arms.
\textsuperscript{19} Also see Ewing (1947, 1959), Scanlon (1998: 95-100), Dancy (2000), and Olson (2006). For the contrary view, see for instance Crisp 2005.
As far as I can see, the fact that the bear might injure and kill you is a reason to do anything only in so far as being injured or killed is something undesirable and bad. The natural facts grounds and partly constitutes its negative value, but as such they are insufficient to explain why you ought to do anything.

Note that a reason to think that reference to values is indispensable to explain why we ought to do certain things is that there are cases in which we have reasons for action, and are aware of these reasons, although we have no clue as to the underlying natural properties. When experiencing shame at a course of action, we can sense that what we consider doing is shameful, but we might have little insight into what makes it so. What we will say, then, is that the reason we avoided this option is that we thought that it was a shameful thing to do.

Let us turn to another problem with NS-normative.

4) The Wrong Kind of Reason Objection

The Wrong Kind of Reason Objection aims at criticising all current versions of neo-sentimentalism (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004). It starts with the observation that emotions can be assessed in terms of quite different dimensions. They can be claimed to be morally, aesthetically, or prudentially adequate or inadequate, for instance. The second step is to argue on the basis of examples that some of these considerations do not bear on whether the object of the emotion has the corresponding evaluative property. It might well be morally objectionable to be amused by a cruel joke, but this does not entail that the joke is not amusing. Or it might be ill-advised to envy a rich

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20 Thanks to Jonas Olson for pressing this point.
friend’s possessions, though they are genuinely enviable (2000a: 731). As D’Arms and Jacobson write, “only certain good reasons for or against having a response bear on the associated evaluative judgement [...]” (Ibid.). Their claim, then, is that a satisfactory account has to “offer [...] resources to differentiate (and hence to preclude conflating) moral and prudential reasons for feeling a sentiment [...] from reasons bearing on whether [x is V]. Hence, until the relevant notion of appropriateness is specified, the theory is incomplete.” (2000a: 732) In other words, a neo-sentimentalist has to give an account of the notion of appropriateness that allows us to distinguish considerations that are relevant from those that not with respect to the question whether something has the corresponding value. D’Arms and Jacobson discuss the accounts of the major contemporary neo-sentimentalists – John McDowell, Simon Blackburn, David Wiggins and Alan Gibbard – and conclude that they all fail what could be called the “Conflation Test”.

As far as I can see, the account I favour passes the test, but, somewhat ironically, it is not clear that D’Arms and Jacobson’s own account passes it. More precisely, it is not clear that an account that analyses evaluative judgements in terms of normative requirements on emotions can avoid the Wrong Kind of Reason Objection – I shall leave it open whether this is really the account D’Arms and Jacobson embrace.

First, it is quite obvious that NS-descriptive passes the test. Since appropriateness is not considered to be a normative feature, there is no risk of conflating it with moral or prudential considerations. Thus, there should be no risk of conflating the reasons to believe that an emotion is appropriate or inappropriate, in the given sense, with moral or prudential reasons for the emotion. That a joke is cruel and hence the amusement morally
objectionable, for instance, has no bearing on whether the amusement you experience fits the evaluative fact. The latter depends strictly on whether the joke is amusing or not.

It might be thought that this is not sufficient to meet the Wrong Kind of Reason Objection. What we need, it might be claimed, is an account which tells us whether a consideration is one that is relevant or not with respect to a response’s appropriateness. Thus, when discussing David Wiggins’ account, D’Arms and Jacobson complain that this account fails “to point out something about emotions such as shame which we can use in deciding when they are and are not appropriate” (2000a: 736). They agree that part of the reply is that (to switch to the case of amusement) “there is no way to specify what is funny, for instance, expect by reference to amusement [...]” (ibid.). But they claim that more is needed: what we would need to know is what sort of considerations about amusement can be appealed to in order to determine whether something is funny or not. According to them, the conflation problem looms until we know what the relevant class of reasons is.

Compare the following considerations: that being amused by this joke is morally objectionable, that your sister is the target of the joke, or that you have smoked pot. It is natural to think that the two last considerations, but not the first, counts against the amusement being appropriate in the relevant sense. Some considerations refer to circumstances that by analogy to the perceptual case can be said to count as *defeaters* for the emotions, in the sense that they indicate that the emotion in question is likely to fail to present things as they are, while others mention facts that are irrelevant. Thus, the question D’Arms and Jacobson ask is what the principled way of distinguishing between these two kinds of considerations would be.
I think that the correct reply to D’Arms and Jacobson is to say that one should not put too heavy a burden on the neo-sentimentalist’s shoulders. Quite generally, most of the truths about what counts as a defeater cannot be known a priori. Consider again the perceptual case. To know that looking at things in the dark tends to interfere with our colour perception or that things plunged into water appear to have a different shape compared to their real one, it is not sufficient to learn colour or shape concepts. What we know a priori is that looking red or looking square is correct on condition that no defeater interferes. In the same way, the neo-sentimentalist can claim that what we know a priori is that being amused is appropriate on condition that no defeater interferes with the amusement. But she can add that when we acquire an evaluative concept, we do not learn the list of circumstances that are likely to make our responses inappropriate. Indeed, given the open-ended character of such lists, this is not something that could be known a priori (Pettit 1991: 603). As Hume would put it, it is experience that teaches us what circumstances are likely to interfere with our responses (See Hume 1740, III, 3, i). It is experience that teaches us that looking at things in the dark tends to interfere with our colour perception or that things plunged into water appear to have a different shape compared to their real one. Again, it is experience that teaches us that having smoked pot or being the target of a joke is not particularly helpful in assessing whether something is genuinely amusing.

An important insight of recent discussions of this question is that in order to determine what counts as a defeater or not, we need to take into account not only our own experiences at different times and in different conditions, but also the experiences of other persons. Thus, when we want to determine whether or not something should count as a
defeater, we have to look to our shared practice of discounting certain conditions as likely to interfere with our responses, a practice that aims at making sense of intrapersonal, but also interpersonal discrepancies (Pettit 1991: 600-601).

What about the NS-normative? As it stands, it is certainly threatened by the Wrong Kind of Reason Objection, for it does not exclude moral or prudential considerations. The obvious move is to specify the kind of norms at stake. If one wants to resist the claim that it is because x is V that the emotional response is required, the only possibility is to claim that there is a special kind of norm, to be specified, that avoids the conflation problem. It seems that there are two ways to go here. One is to claim that the norm in question is *sui generis.* 21 The problem with this is that it would make the bi-conditional quite unattractive. The analysis would appeal to a concept that seems much more obscure than our familiar evaluative concepts. Unless we are told more about this *sui generis* norm – how do we know that it applies, and how does it relate to other sorts of norms in case of conflict – we are left with nothing but an empty promise. The other possibility is to deny that the norm is *sui generis.* However, as long as the norm in question is not specified, it will be quite unclear whether this is merely wishful thinking or not. 22 In any case, what should be underlined is that an account of the norms in question is in order. Note that this will also involve taking a stance with respect to the ontological status of norms. That means that there might be an ontological price to pay, but as things stand, its cost is not known.

21 See Ewing 1947; and Danielsson and Olson 2007. This might also be Brentano’s view. In any case, he would reject NS-descriptive, since he denies that correctness is a matter of identity between the content of the attitude of love and hate and something which is external to the mind (1889: 60).

22 It is not clear where D’Arms and Jacobson stand. They write: “To call a sentiment appropriate in this sense is to give it a specific and limited form of endorsement, which is neither a judgment of rightness, prudence, or warrant, nor an all-in endorsement of the sentiment as what to feel.” (2000a: 746) Since they go on to claim that to judge an emotion to be *fitting* constitutes taking its object to have the evaluative property, it might well be that they endorse NS-descriptive. But they do not adopt this view explicitly.
5) Circularity threats

The upshot so far is that NS-descriptive is better placed than NS-normative. But few will be tempted by NS-descriptive. What appear to be obvious and decisive objections threaten it. The aim of this section is to try and dispel the main ones.

The most important worry is that NS-descriptive is much too circular to be of interest (Blackburn 1998; Sosa 2001). In contrast with NS-normative, NS-descriptive avoids Blackburn’s Charybdis (1998: 108), namely the danger of incorporating normative concepts into the *analysans*. And it also avoids Blackburn’s Scylla, that is, the danger of going naturalistic or empirical, which is in fact simply the danger of not meeting the Normativity Requirement. But this might well seem a meagre consolation. The reason is that it might seem that the bi-conditional merely claims that something has an evaluative property just in case it really has the evaluative property in question. Quite true, but quite unhelpful.

This is to forget that NS-descriptive claims that there is a relation between evaluative concepts and emotion concepts. As David Wiggins noted in an early defence of neo-sentimentalism, the aim is to “elucidate the concept of value by displaying its actual involvement with the sentiments. One would not [...] have sufficiently elucidated what value is *without* that detour.” (1987: 189; see also Pettit 1991: 604) But why make that detour? To paraphrase Wiggins, the important point is that when we try to find out whether something is admirable or shameful, for instance, there is nothing more fundamental to appeal to than our responses of admiration and shame. What this means is that the bi-conditional makes an epistemic point. Clearly, the expertise in affective concepts involves
the ability to feel the relevant emotions. The bi-conditional points toward the epistemic indispensability of our emotional responses.\(^{23}\)

But how can it be claimed that emotions are epistemically indispensable?\(^{24}\) Given NS-descriptive, it might seem that in order to make evaluative judgements, it is sufficient to know that the relevant emotion represents things correctly, something one can know without ever having experienced any emotion. The reply to this objection consists in explaining why NS-descriptive is true. NS-descriptive does not aim to give the \textit{application conditions} of evaluative concepts – it would be quite hopeless for such a task. Instead, it aims at stating what a theorist can infer from our evaluative practice. The claim is that the \textit{a priori} relation between evaluative and emotional concepts expressed in the bi-conditional follows from the way these concepts have been formed and are presently used. Whatever way the details of this story are filled out, it is plausible that the fact that we have such concepts is intimately related to our emotional capacities.\(^{25}\) More precisely, it seems plausible that primary or canonical attributions of evaluative concepts of the kind I am considering here are done on the basis of our emotional responses (Pettit 1991: 600 sq.). When something amuses me, I am inclined to think that the thing in question is amusing. And it would seem that our practice with respect to such concepts is such that if I have no reason to believe that I got things wrong, then I am justified in thinking the thing amusing. Though fallible, our emotional responses would thus ground our evaluative judgements.

\(^{23}\) See Johnston 2001: 181: “Seeing the utterly specific ways in which a situation, animal or person is appealing or repellent requires an appropriate affective engagement with the situation, animal or person. Absence of appropriate affect makes us affect blind.”

\(^{24}\) I owe this question to Sarah Stroud.

\(^{25}\) My preference goes to Philip Pettit’s “ethnocentric” genealogy: we start with our various emotional responses to things, which we thus tend to find similar and we end with our evaluative concepts because, in order to make sense of the differences in our responses, we assume that certain conditions interfere with our responses (Pettit 1991; see also Wiggins 1987).
Understood this way, the bi-conditional aims at explaining the *possession conditions* of evaluative concepts, something which is claimed to involve experiencing emotional responses and grounding one’s evaluative judgements on these responses.

There is another charge of circularity that concerns the relation of emotions to evaluative judgements. In its strongest version, the objection claims that emotions are evaluative judgements. No wonder, then, that the bi-conditional is true. It is about as interesting as the claim that x is a proton if and only if the judgement that x is a proton is correct. This would be viciously circular, since ‘is a proton’ appears on both side of the bi-conditional. And this is so even if one takes the analysis to state possession conditions instead of application conditions. It is true that the concepts used by the theorist need not be possessed or used by the agent whose concept possession is explained (Menzies 1998). However, the problem is that the concept in question appears within the content of a mental state. To explain the possession of the concept, one would have appealed to a state whose content involves the concept at stake. Moreover, if emotions are evaluative judgements, the epistemic claim is also threatened. It would amount to the claim that what justifies an evaluative judgement is the evaluative judgement itself. Whatever one’s favourite epistemology, self-justification of this kind is a non-starter.

One way to go here is to bite the bullet and claim that there is no way of understanding what the emotional response is independently of what the matching evaluative concept is and *vice versa*, that the evaluative concept has to be elucidated in terms of the corresponding response (Wiggins 1987). I think that this is part of the story. However, there is something that should be added. To feel an emotion like amusement, fear or disgust, it is not necessary to possess the corresponding evaluative concepts. It’s quite
wrong to think that to be amused by something is to judge, believe or even think or imagine that the thing in question is amusing. Quite generally, as cases of so-called recalcitrant emotions show, emotions are not and do not necessarily involve evaluative judgements. Actually, there are reasons to think that they involve a pre-judgemental or non-conceptual representation of values. This is not the place to give the full argument for this claim. But if it is true, then the bi-conditional need not involve vicious circularity: the evaluative judgement is not analysed in terms of a mental state that involves the corresponding evaluative concepts in its content. Even if it is true that in order to identify an emotion, it is necessary to state which evaluative property it is supposed to track – its formal object – experiencing the emotion does not amount to applying this very concept.

A last worry is that by stipulating that the emotion’s correction conditions are satisfied, NS-descriptive is trivial. It would not be better than the alleged analysis of red in terms of what looks red in whatever conditions it takes to ensure that something looks red when it is red. But this would seem to be entirely trivial (Wright 1992). Philip Pettit’s reply to this challenge (1991, 1998) in the case of colours is that the conditions in question have to be specified as those that are fit to survive the practice of discounting certain responses in an attempt to make sense of intra- and interpersonal discrepancies, assuming colour stability. According to this suggestion, something is red if and only if it looks red in conditions that are fit to survive our discounting practice (1998). In the same way, then, one can suggest that NS-descriptive should be amended in the following claim:

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27 See Peacocke 1992: 89 for the same type of suggestion with respect to perceptual concepts.
(NS-descriptive-amended) x is V if and only if x is such that E in response to x is felt in conditions that are fit to survive our discounting practice.

The question is how to understand what it is for a condition to be fit for surviving our discounting practice. In the case of colours or of shapes, it is natural to assume that the practice in question aims at discovering an objective reality. It differs thus from the practice underlying ‘U’ as used by the Sloanes, a practice which depends on a group of people having “an authoritative, dictating role in regard to the concept”. (Pettit 1991: 611) But even if we take a practice to aim at knowledge in a given area, and we also assume that there is a reality out there to be known, there is no guarantee that the conditions which are robust enough to pass the test of time are the ones in which things are seen as they are. At most, we can hope that the conditions which pass the test are the ones in which there are no distortions. And this brings us back to NS-descriptive, for the conditions we hope will survive our discounting practice are the ones in which we get things right, so that these are the ones which have to figure in the analysans. Understood this way, the amended version is equivalent to NS-descriptive. Note again that it would be wrong to ask for more. As I argued above, most of our knowledge of what counts as unfavourable conditions is not a priori. That means that NS-descriptive only gives the general framework of what has to be done to determine if something has an evaluative property of the kind considered here. It reminds us that we have to start with our affective responses. This may seem a frustratingly small step, but it is better than nothing.
**Conclusion**

The upshot is that NS-descriptive has to be preferred to NS-normative. NS-descriptive easily satisfies the Normativity Requirement. It does better than NS-normative with respect to the Wrong Kind of Reason Objection and contrary to NS-normative it allows for straightforward normative action explanation. Moreover, understood properly the account avoids vicious circularity. Given that it bears testimony to the epistemic indispensability of our emotional responses, one could dub it “epistemic neo-sentimentalism”.

What about the ontological commitments of this approach? In fact, it leaves the question of the ontological status of values quite open. We have seen that it appears to rule out certain kinds of value anti-realism. Epistemic neo-sentimentalism is naturally read as claiming that an emotion with respect to something is appropriate or correct because the thing in question has some mind-independent evaluative property. It is compatible with robust value realism. But epistemic neo-sentimentalism does not entail that there are objective values. The story could be true and there could still be no value out there. Epistemic neo-sentimentalism is thus consistent with an error theory (Mackie 1977). In addition to this, an argument would be needed to show that our evaluative concepts are used in the way epistemic neo-sentimentalism claims. I believe this task is not impossible, but note that as far as I can see, it has to be done piecemeal, concept by concept, for it might turn out that some evaluative concepts are underlined by a practice of discovery, while the practice corresponding to the others is one of invention.

If what I have called “epistemic neo-sentimentalism” is on the right track, one could conclude that the recognition of evaluative facts involved in emotions could indeed have an
impact on our action. This is so when the emotion itself comes with a motivational state. In such cases, emotions would have the dual role of tracking values and motivating us accordingly. Thus, epistemic neo-sentimentalism, as expressed in NS-descriptive, preserves the main attractions of neo-sentimentalist accounts.

**Bibliography**


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28 In fact, the relation between emotions and motivation is more complicated than usually supposed. See Tappolet 2009.


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