

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Affective injustice and fundamental affective goods

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In societies like ours, people who are victims of injustice may face a wide variety of morally objectionable burdens and harms. Most obvious, perhaps, are the *practical*, *social*, and *political* disadvantages brought about by unjust conditions and actions. But in addition to these, there are *emotional* costs of injustice that can take an immense toll on individuals and communities. What is the nature of the emotional harms and burdens that arise from injustice? Do these harms and burdens constitute a distinctive form of injustice in their own right? If so, what precisely makes them unjust? These questions are central to the philosophical investigation of “affective injustice”—that is, injustice faced by people specifically in their capacity as affective beings (Archer and Mills 2019, 75).

Philosophical inquiry into affective injustice examines how certain kinds of morally objectionable actions, practices, and circumstances bring about harms and disadvantages specifically related to emotions, moods, feelings, affective dispositions, and other “valenced” states. Such harms and disadvantages might consist of distressing experiences of fear, anger, sadness, and despair. They might also include deeper changes to the very shape of one’s emotional life through trauma, burnout, mental illness, and the systematic misdirection of one’s emotional responses as a result of ideology, gaslighting, or other influences. These and other emotional and affective harms and disadvantages may be caused by the stress, suffering, and limitations associated with such things as poverty and financial precarity; structural and interpersonal racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression; bullying and emotional abuse; school or work settings that are emotionally exhausting or traumatizing; pernicious norms governing the experience and expression of affective states; or emotional manipulations embedded in physical and digital environments designed to enrich some at others’ expense.

The philosophical literature on affective injustice is currently in a nascent state. Several explicit treatments of the topic have been offered (Srinivasan 2018; Whitney 2018; Plunkett 2020; Archer and Matheson 2020), but there has been no systematic overview of the conceptual terrain. While a plausible conception of affective injustice has been offered, the notion of “an injustice faced by someone specifically in their capacity as an affective being” is quite general, and it remains unclear how we should specify this concept. In particular, the extant literature contains no developed account of the conditions on something being an affective injustice. As a result, it remains unclear how various treatments of affective injustice are related to one another or how to present or future disagreements among theorists might be adjudicated.

Nevertheless, despite the nascent state of the literature, the topic of affective injustice appears to be ripe for philosophical exploration. Although the term “affective injustice” was coined relatively recently, the emotional burdens of oppression have long been of great interest to philosophers who research social identity and inequality.<sup>1</sup> The work of these philosophers suggests that our emotions and moods are not merely private and personal but, rather, are bound up in a wide variety of social processes and, as such, can be a site of both the experience and the perpetration of injustice. Moreover, the recent explosion of philosophical research on *epistemic injustice*—that is, the injustice faced by people specifically in their capacity as knowers—has illustrated the philosophical value of theoretically isolating and naming particular categories of harm and disadvantage brought about by unjust actions and practices, particularly when those harms can be invisible because they are internal and related to the mind. In the relatively short time since the publication of Miranda Fricker’s (2007) seminal book on the topic of epistemic injustice, a vibrant subfield of philosophical inquiry has emerged, exploring issues such as testimonial injustice, hermeneutic injustice, epistemic resources, epistemic responsibility, epistemologies of ignorance, and their connections to racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.<sup>2</sup> It is not difficult to imagine a comparable development of the philosophical inquiry into the topic of affective injustice, once a more developed framework is available to facilitate the collection of the many insights relevant to the investigation of affective injustice that currently remains scattered in what may appear to be unrelated texts.

At the same time, the comparison to epistemic injustice reveals some of the philosophical complexities that make inquiry into affective injustice particularly challenging. One source of difficulty is the lack of clarity regarding the normative standards by which we should evaluate people’s emotional lives. If we grant that a given circumstance has harmed someone in their capacity as an affective being, an adequate explanation of this fact requires that we first explain what it might mean for a person’s emotional life to go well or poorly. Analogous questions regarding the nature of epistemic harm are somewhat easier to answer, insofar as it is relatively straightforward to determine what is good for a knower—namely, the circumstances and capacities that facilitate their grasp of *truth*—and on this basis, we can evaluate particular epistemic practices and the conditions that influence those practices. But there is no philosophical consensus regarding what it would mean to do well or poorly as an affective being.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, the central aim of this article is to facilitate philosophical inquiry into affective injustice by specifying the concept of affective injustice, clarifying the conditions on something being an affective injustice, and drawing a sketch of the scope of the phenomenon in a more thorough and systematic manner than has been previously attempted. In section two, I argue that affective injustice should be defined as a state in which individuals or groups are deprived of “affective goods” which are owed to them. This way of understanding the concept of affective injustice directs theorists to examine which affective goods may be fundamental and which subsidiary goods may be most necessary for their provision. Then in the remaining sections, I identify two possible fundamental affective goods, *subjective well-being* and *emotional aptness*, and I discuss the various forms of affective injustice that may be related to the deprivation of these affective goods. In this way, I hope to show that my proposed understanding of the general concept of affective injustice can shed new light on the particular types of affective injustice described in the extant literature, while also allowing us to identify further types that have not been theorized to the same extent.

## 2 | SPECIFYING THE CONCEPT OF AFFECTIVE INJUSTICE

Affective injustice has been defined as injustice suffered in one’s capacity as an affective being. But what does it mean to suffer an injustice in one’s capacity as an affective being? In this section, I begin

with a brief review of the extant literature on affective injustice, showing that while previous treatments of the topic identify particular types of affective injustice, they do not articulate or clarify the conditions on something being an affective injustice, and for this reason, important questions remain unanswered regarding the claims made by each account, as well as the relationship these accounts have to one another. With these points in mind, I then offer my own preferred specification of the concept.

According to Shiloh Whitney (2018), several types of affective injustice can arise when members of oppressed social groups find that they are frequently unable to receive proper “uptake” to their emotional expressions, such as their expressions of distress and anger (495). Whitney’s approach to these cases is grounded in a distinctive view of the “energetic” and embodied nature of affectivity, according to which emotional expressions can facilitate a healthy “circulation” (499) of affective energy through bodies. Such circulation is said to occur when emotional expressions are properly recognized by others and thereby give rise to reciprocal affective responses. Whitney argues, however, that oppressive social practices can prevent this circulation from occurring. For example, oppressive social practices can influence the “social conditions of sense-making” (512) in a way that makes it harder for those who are privileged to understand and empathize with the emotional expressions of the oppressed. When the circulation of the affective energy contained in such emotions expressions is blocked, this constitutes an affective injustice:

While *epistemic* injustice damages the credibility given one’s claims, *affective* injustice damages the weight afforded one’s feelings. The weight at issue is not that of belief, but of affective force: when my anger is unjustly refused uptake, it is not appropriately *moving* to others; it does not affect them as it should (495).

When affective circulation is blocked in this way, Whitney argues, the affective energy of members of oppressed social groups becomes trapped or “quarantined” in their bodies, and, as a result, it becomes “toxic” to them (497). When such processes exclude individuals from the shared world of affective circulation, this gives rise to what Whitney calls “affective marginalization” (499). When some individuals are compelled to give uptake to the emotional expression of those with more social power without being given similar forms of uptake in return, this gives rise to what she terms “affective exploitation” (502). When affective marginalization and affective exploitation are combined in a particularly severe manner, this constitutes what she calls “affective violence” (504).

Whitney’s analysis offers important insights and rich theoretical resources, but several questions about her account can be raised. In virtue of what, exactly, do the cases that Whitney describes count as instances of affective injustice? Although Whitney’s discussion focuses on the lack of reciprocity and recognition of emotional expressions, she does not argue that one has a legitimate claim to reciprocal recognition of one’s emotional expressions as a matter of respect, for instance. Instead, she seems to view such recognition as a mechanism for the circulation of affective energy, which matters for considerations of justice insofar as uncirculated affects become “toxic.” What, then, is the general principle that explains why suffering from toxic affects in such cases is an affective injustice? For example, does Whitney’s account rest on the implicit notion that we have a right to emotional health? If so, what grounds such a right, and what does it consist in? Whatever the general principle underlying the account may be, does this principle apply to cases in which people suffer from toxic affects for other reasons? More generally, does the category of affective injustice cover other types of cases, beyond those involving toxic affects? If so, how should we identify and think about such cases? And are there other types of affective injustice that cannot be understood in terms of emotional health and

toxicity? Such questions can only be addressed with reference to a specified account of the conditions on something being an affective injustice.

Amia Srinivasan (2018) offers an alternative approach to the topic of affective injustice, focusing on cases in which members of oppressed social groups are compelled to suppress their anger, even when this anger is warranted. Srinivasan's central example is the anger felt by black people in response to instances of structural and interpersonal racism. Srinivasan argues that when such anger is expressed in interpersonal interactions or political protests, it can sometimes result in "making the angry person worse off, and indeed exacerbating the very situation at which she is angry," or even "invite further violence and retrenchment" (131). However, despite being imprudent in these ways, such anger is apt when it is properly *targeted* (toward a "genuine normative violation"), *motivated* (e.g., by a concern for justice rather than revenge), and *proportional* (relative to the gravity of the violation) (127-130). The result, Srinivasan says, is a double-bind in which "victims of oppression must choose between getting aptly angry or acting prudentially," and this double-bind constitutes "a form of unrecognized injustice, what I call *affective* injustice" (127).

Srinivasan says that although being compelled to navigate such double-binds is "a sort of psychic tax that is often levied on victims of oppression," nevertheless "the wrongness of affective injustice does not lie primarily in the fact that it makes its victims feel bad" (136).<sup>4</sup> Instead, Srinivasan suggests that the wrongness of this kind of circumstance "lies rather in the fact that it forces people, through no fault of their own, into profoundly difficult normative conflicts—an invidious choice between improving one's lot and justified rage" (136). While this line of thought is promising, it requires clarification and development. For example, it seems to suggest that Srinivasan would disagree with Whitney's treatment of affective injustice, insofar as Whitney's treatment focuses primarily on the ways that refusal of uptake makes people "feel bad"—although Srinivasan provides no argument for such a critique. Moreover, in a later section, I will return to Srinivasan's analysis to highlight some important questions that it leaves unresolved and propose an original way to clarify the analysis of emotional aptness. As we will see, the lack of clarity in Srinivasan's account arises from the fact that it does not specify the general concept of affective injustice or clarify the conditions on something being an affective injustice. As a result, the account is not in a position to explain why the particular kinds of cases Srinivasan describes should count as instances of affective injustice, nor can it help us identify or reject other possible types of affective injustice.

Similar concerns arise with regard to Archer and Matheson's (2020) account of affective injustice, which focuses on the issue of "extrinsic emotional regulation," that is, practices that seek to influence other people's emotions. The authors' central example is a case in which a professional athlete from Northern Ireland refused to participate in the practice of wearing a plastic red poppy to commemorate Remembrance Day in the UK and, in response, received abuse and even death threats. The authors argue that "people who have experienced trauma because of the behaviour of a particular army have a right not to engage in commemorative practices that honour that army" (9). In developing this argument, the authors claim that the extrinsic emotional regulation, in this case, constitutes "two distinct forms of affective injustice" (1). First, it is a violation of the athlete's "rights to feel"—that is, a violation of the right to determine one's own emotional responses without undue "pressure to feel or express certain emotions" (9). Second, it is an instance of what the authors call "emotional imperialism," which they define as, "a powerful group imposing aspects of its culture's emotional norms and standards on another less powerful group whilst at the same time marking out the other culture's emotional norms and standards as deviant and inferior" (11).

Archer and Matheson's analysis here is rich and insightful, but it leaves important questions unresolved. For example, it is unclear what might ground a person's "rights to feel" or explain why the violation of such a right is an affective injustice. While the authors concede that criticism of others'

emotional responses can be reasonable, they object to the “enforcement” of such critical appraisals, insofar as the latter is “abusive” (5). Yet we might ask: Does this sort of abusive enforcement count as an affective injustice because it undermines the targeted person’s *emotional health*, which is the central concern of Whitney’s account, or because it creates conditions in which the targeted person may need to *suppress apt emotions*, as Srinivasan might put it—or simply because the pressure is “abusive”? In the latter case, do we really need the concept of affective injustice to explain the wrongness of the abuse involved in this case (e.g., death threats), or would more standard notions of injustice suffice? Similar questions can be raised about the notion of emotional imperialism: Is engaging in such imperialism wrong simply because it is disrespectful, for instance, or must the harm involved here be explained with reference to specific considerations about what is necessary for a person’s emotional life to go well? If affective injustice is to be distinguished from forms of injustice that consist in other kinds of harms or disadvantages—that is, if affective injustice is determined to be something more than simply an injustice with some contingent connection to emotions and moods—then the inquiry into affective injustice will be more philosophically significant. However, establishing such a distinction requires explaining why affective injustices consist in harms or disadvantages that are specifically located in the domain of affectivity, even if they can also be described as injustices in other senses or have negative effects in other domains as well.

In addition to the unresolved questions surrounding the treatments of affective injustice in the extant literature, we might also be concerned about how we might adjudicate future disputes about possible cases of affective injustice. For example, we might imagine theorists who take Archer and Matheson’s analysis one step further to claim that one never has the right to criticize another person’s emotional responses, and that even relatively mild forms of extrinsic emotional regulation constitute an affective injustice. I would be inclined to object to such a view, for reasons I discuss later—but because none of the discussions of affective injustice in the extant literature articulate the conditions on which something is an affective injustice, there currently exists no framework to aid in pressing such an objection or otherwise determining the limits of the concept’s application.

With these considerations in mind, I advocate a specification of the concept of affective injustice that draws from the broader philosophical literature on justice. This literature is vast and varied, but a common starting place is the notion that justice exists when each person has the goods—for example, freedoms, resources, opportunities, and forms of recognition—they are owed.<sup>5</sup> Injustice, then, is the morally objectionable deprivation of such goods. With these basic concepts as a starting point, theories of justice and injustice can then take up diverse positions on a wide variety of issues, such as which goods are most morally urgent, the relationship among these goods, and what makes their deprivation morally objectionable—for example, because it is unfair, or because it is disrespectful, or because it fails to maximize utility, and so on.

Accordingly, I propose that we can define affective justice as a state in which each person has the *affective goods* they are owed. Such affective goods might be specified with reference to *affective freedoms*, *affective resources*, *affective opportunities*, and *forms of affective recognition*. Affective injustice, then, is the morally objectionable deprivation of such affective goods. On the basis of this general concept, we can say that questions regarding *distributive* affective injustice concern the morally objectionable distribution of affective goods across members of a society. When the societal frameworks that direct, influence, and execute this distribution are unjust (such as in the cases I discuss in the following sections), the operation of these frameworks give rise to instances of distributive affective injustice. Questions of *corrective* affective injustice relate to the occurrence of alleged affective wrongdoings and the resolution of bilateral disputes about such wrongdoings, where an “affective wrongdoing” is the violation of a person’s affective rights, that is, legitimate claims to affective goods.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of affective injustice that I propose—according to which affective injustice is the morally objectionable deprivation of affective goods—thus directs theorists to examine the nature of affective goods, the moral status of their distribution, and what sorts of legitimate claims to such goods individuals may hold. In what follows, I offer an exploratory discussion of the first of these topics: the nature of affective goods. To inquire about the nature of affective goods is to ask about how things can go well for us as affective beings. In other words, affective goods contribute positively to our emotional lives. A central principle guiding my exploratory sketch in the following sections is that the analysis of affective goods in relation to considerations of justice should aim to identify which kinds of affective goods are *fundamental*. An affective good is fundamental if it is not merely instrumentally valuable for the attainment of other goods, including non-affective goods such as physical well-being, but, rather, is a primary way that things can go well for us as affective beings. Fundamental affective goods not only contribute positively to our emotional lives but count as core components of a desirable, excellent, or thriving emotional life. When we compare different kinds of affective goods, an affective good will be fundamental if what makes it morally urgent, and so relevant in matters of justice, is not merely that it is an instance or subcategory of a more general kind of affective good. In other words, an affective good is fundamental if it is analytically basic and non-reducible, in the sense that the analysis of the good in question requires concepts that are incommensurable with concepts required to analyze other affective goods.

To illustrate the significance of these notions and demonstrate how my proposed specification of the concept of affective injustice allows us to explain the conditions on something being an affective injustice, let us now examine how my suggested approach might be used in the development of a theoretical framework for understanding particular types and cases of affective injustice.

### 3 | SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

One affective good that may be fundamental in the sense described above is *subjective well-being* (sometimes called “emotional well-being” in the psychological literature). In colloquial terms, the core intuition here is that an excellent, desirable, or thriving emotional life is one that is *happy*. However, in order to avoid some of the complex and trenchant philosophical debates surrounding the nature of happiness, it may be helpful to rely on the notion of subjective well-being, which is comparatively less freighted. Subjective well-being has its conceptual home in empirical psychology, where it is defined in terms of mood, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction (Deiner et al. 1999; Haybron 2008; Raibley 2013). “Mood” in this context typically refers to the balance of one’s positive and negative affective states, while “self-esteem” and “life-satisfaction” refer to an affective evaluation of oneself and of one’s life as a whole. For example, a person who is in a cheerful mood, who is experiencing pleasant emotions such as gratitude, hope, or mirth and relatively few unpleasant or distressing emotions, and who feels that they are a good and worthy person and that their life is going reasonably well, would score high on measures of subjective well-being.

A detailed examination of subjective well-being and related constructs is beyond the scope of this article. However, a review of the psychological literature on subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005) shows substantial evidence that it is instrumentally valuable in many ways, contributing positively to such things as one’s physical health, cognitive functioning, relationships, work performance, and salary. More importantly, for our purposes, subjective well-being may also be intrinsically valuable for people as affective beings. Indeed, even if one doubts the *moral* value of subjective well-being, or doubts that subjective well-being is *sufficient* for having a desirable emotional life, the notion that subjective well-being has positive value for us as affective beings seems almost tautological.

If subjective well-being is a fundamental affective good, as I suspect it is, then it would be fruitful to theorize about which subsidiary goods might be necessary for the provision of this good and to which one might have a legitimate claim, or which might be distributed to members of a society in a just or unjust manner, including the following:

- *Affective freedoms*, such as freedom from interference in the pursuit of subjective well-being, including freedom from circumstances that give rise to emotional distress and negative or unpleasant emotions and moods.
- *Affective resources and opportunities*, such as materials, activities, and circumstances that contribute positively to one's subjective well-being, including nurturing interpersonal and social relationships; sleep, therapy, and other means of providing self-care; and "affective scaffolds" (Maiese 2016) in the built environment that facilitate positive mood and self-evaluation.
- *Affective recognition*, such as respectful consideration of, and responsiveness to, one's particular needs with regard to subjective well-being.

From this perspective, considerations of affective injustice would arise regarding conditions in which a person or social group is unduly subjected to such things as: frequent and/or intense experiences of fear, grief, anger, distrust, and resignation; being stuck in boring or emotionally violating or disorienting educational institutions or jobs; being forced to endure prolonged and intense stress from financial precarity, long hours, and difficult commutes; being deprived of sleep and opportunities for self-care; being deprived of nurturing relationships with friends and family members who have been deported, incarcerated, incapacitated, or killed; spending one's life in ugly or depressing environments or regularly exposed to discouraging or degrading messages; being treated without consideration of one's emotional needs; and being ignored, silenced, or sanctioned when expressing one's emotions and emotional needs.

If this is correct, one key aim of a theory of affective injustice should be to help us to determine which deprivations of subjective well-being rise to the level of being an injustice. Presumably not all circumstances that give rise to unpleasant emotions, or any instances in which a person's emotional expressions are socially sanctioned, constitute significant harms to that person's subjective well-being. After all, there can be significant positive value in even profound suffering and hardship, insofar as the experience of suffering and hardship can be deeply meaningful in certain contexts, and it can also contribute positively to a person or community's resilience and creativity (Brady 2018; Plews-Ogan et al. 2019; Kaufman 2020). But while theories of affective injustice should not be overly demanding in classifying slight deprivations of subjective well-being as injustices, they should also avoid the opposite extreme, in which only the most severe forms of emotional abuse and deprivation are deemed unjust. For example, although being routinely bored at work may not be traumatizing, the uneven distribution of boring employment to members of subordinated social groups may constitute a significant affective injustice. Determining where to set the relevant thresholds is likely to be as challenging as it is important to the understanding of affective injustice.

As we will see in the following section, when we inquire about other possible affective goods apart from subjective well-being, we encounter difficult questions regarding the normative evaluation of people's emotional lives. In particular, it is not clear how we might identify non-subjective standards for what counts as a desirable or excellent emotional life. Appealing to subjective well-being avoids this difficulty by grounding such evaluations on a person's own values and their sense of satisfaction with themselves and their lives. Once we move beyond subjective well-being, however, we enter a more theoretically uncertain domain.

It is perhaps for this reason that psychologists tend to motivate their considerations of various aspects of people's emotional lives by appealing exclusively to the value of subjective well-being. For example, consider the construct of *emotional health*, sometimes called "emotional wellness" or discussed in terms of the broader category of "mental health." Such quasi-medical terms, along with correlative terms such as Whitney's (2018) notion of "affective toxicity," seem to suggest a scientifically objective understanding of the role of affectivity in the functioning of a biological organism, one which could allow us to evaluate people's emotional lives in terms other than subjective well-being. However, on closer examination we see that psychologists who study emotional health generally do not articulate and defend such a non-subjective understanding of healthy affective functioning but, rather, define emotional health in terms of enduring propensities, qualities, and characteristics (such as resilience and mind-set) that enable a person to avoid and recover from significant setbacks to their *subjective well-being* (Diener et al. 1999, 279–80; Schutte et al. 2002; Haybron 2008, 135ff). As such, the value of emotional health would be instrumental rather than fundamental.<sup>7</sup>

However, there are also reasons to think that considerations of subjective well-being do not exhaust the ways that our emotional lives can be appropriately evaluated and assessed with regard to matters of justice. For example, beyond subjective well-being, we also seem to admire emotional lives that are well-ordered, grounded in reality, and as complex and rich in meaning as the world itself. To my mind, such a vision of emotional life is evoked by the notion of emotional health, even if this concept is typically described in the psychological literature exclusively in terms of subjective well-being. If an emotionally healthy person is not merely happy, how might we characterize the other affective goods such a person enjoys?

#### 4 | EMOTIONAL APTNESS

The limitations of subjective well-being are illustrated most clearly when we imagine cases in which a person is made to be happy in what seems to be an illegitimate manner, such as by being plugged into the "experience machine" imagined by Robert Nozick (1974) or by taking "soma," the fictional happiness pill described by Aldous Huxley (1932/1998) in the dystopian novel *Brave New World*. One affective good that seems to be lost in such cases is *emotional aptness*, that is, the fit or harmonious correspondence between evaluative properties in the world and one's emotional response to those properties. By ingesting soma, the characters in *Brave New World* lose the capacity to feel anger, fear, and sadness, even when they encounter significant injustices, threats, and losses that warrant such emotional responses. Although the resulting lack of negative emotions facilitates social control and harmony, the outcome is presented in the novel as a tragic loss, an attitude expressed by the character known as the Savage: "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin" (267). This fictional example dramatizes the idea that it is bad for us as affective beings for our emotional responses to lose touch with the world as it is. In colloquial terms, we might say that a desirable or excellent emotional life is not merely happy but also *grounded*, that is, properly responsive to reality.

Is emotional aptness a fundamental affective good?<sup>8</sup> One reason to think so is found in Srinivasan's (2018) contention that responding emotionally to the evaluative properties we encounter (e.g., the *offensiveness* of an injustice or the *beauty* of a work of art), rather than registering these evaluative properties in a merely intellectual way, is necessary for our ability to "appreciate" their significance or meaning (132).<sup>9</sup> This view is plausible, as far as it goes. But we might press further and ask why it is good, with respect to the normative evaluation of our emotional lives, that we are able to appreciate the significance of the evaluative properties we encounter. In particular, does the value of emotional

aptness, and the value of the capacity to appreciate the meaning of the evaluative properties in the world, depend on whether a person cares about aptness and appreciation? For example, we might imagine a person who says that they only want to be happy and do not particularly care about the aptness of their emotions and that they would not be distressed to learn that they have failed to appreciate the meaning of many of the things they encounter.<sup>10</sup> On what grounds might we insist that it is bad for such a person, in their capacity as an affective being, that their emotions are inapt and that they are failing to appreciate the meaning of things?

Srinivasan's work provides no clear answer to this question, and David Plunkett's (2020) reformulation of Srinivasan's view in terms of reasons and their grounds likewise offers no further guidance about the ultimate ground of the value of emotional aptness.<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, I offer my own suggestions regarding how to develop this line of thought. The approach I suggest begins by positing the existence of a *telos*, function, or purpose of emotions. If emotions have a *telos*, function, or purpose, then we can identify a kind of normativity that is inherent to emotions themselves, derived from what Plunkett (2020, fn11) calls "the constitutive standards that govern the attitude in question."<sup>12</sup> In particular, I suggest that emotions can be seen as similar to beliefs, insofar as aiming to be properly responsive to the world is inherent to their very nature. In other words, we might say that it is good for emotions to be aptly responsive to the evaluative properties we encounter *because that is what emotions are for*.

Pressing further, we might ask: What grounds the value of adhering to the constitutive standards of emotions? To answer this question we can shift our focus to the *normative practice* that arises from and interacts with those constitutive standards—namely, the normative practice of emotional aptness, in which we give and ask for reasons to respond emotionally to things in certain ways. Here Srinivasan's (2018, 132) comparison between the emotional appreciation of evaluative properties and the aesthetic appreciation of works of art is instructive.<sup>13</sup> In the normative practice of art appreciation, participants in this practice (artists, art lovers, art dealers, and so on) are obligated or directed *as participants* to respond appropriately to the aesthetic properties of works of art. In other words, in this practice, participants do well when they respond appropriately to artworks. On the basis of this basic goal or purpose of the practice, a rich panoply of sub-practices arise to facilitate the mutual correction of participants' responses to artworks and the collaborative discovery of aesthetic properties. Analogously, then, in the normative practice of emotional aptness, participants are obligated or directed to respond emotionally to evaluative properties in an apt manner and so, in pursuit of this aim, create and participate in various sub-practices that facilitate the mutual correction of participants' emotional responses and the collaborative discovery of evaluative properties. We see just such a practice in nearly every part of everyday life, in parents' and teachers' efforts to help children and students direct their emotions more aptly, in conversations among friends, romantic partners, and work colleagues about what emotional response is justified in a given circumstance, in debates among political commentators and cultural critics about the meaning or significance of current events or cultural products, and so on.

Understanding the value of emotional aptness as being internal to such a normative practice enables us to avoid construing the value of emotional aptness as dependent on what a person desires or cares about. In this way, it avoids the conclusion that emotional aptness is merely instrumentally good for those whose subjective well-being depends on believing that their emotional responses are apt. It avoids this conclusion by locating the value of emotional aptness within the parameters of a practice, and in particular, a practice that one may participate in *even if* one does not desire to do so or care about doing so. By way of analogy, consider that if a person does not desire to play a game, or if they do not value a normative practice, this does not mean that they are exempt from the rules of the game, nor that they cannot be evaluated with reference to the standards that are inherent to the normative practice. For example, a basketball team could not legitimately claim they did not really "lose" the match

because they stopped wanting to play and instead took up singing halfway through the game. From the perspective of participants in the normative practice of basketball, by singing instead of dribbling and shooting, the players were still playing basketball; they were simply playing exceptionally badly. Likewise, some would argue that a person who does not care about the normative practice of morality can still be properly evaluated as immoral. Analogously, then, a person who does not care whether their emotions are apt could still be considered to be missing out on a fundamental affective good.

It is clear that many of us care about and value our participation in the normative practice of emotional aptness and so would suffer severe deprivations to our subjective well-being if we were unable to participate in it, either as a result of our own incapacitation or because others refused to engage with us as legitimate participants. At the same time, we can think of many cases in which exiting this practice and no longer be expected to maintain a rational warrant for our emotional states may contribute positively to one's subjective well-being. In either case, however, it is important in the context of this discussion that the ultimate value of emotional aptness does not lie in whether aptness contributes to our subjective well-being. Instead, according to the view, I am proposing, the value of emotional aptness is internal to the normative practice of emotional aptness and grounded on the constitutive standards of emotions themselves, derived from the *telos*, purpose, or function of emotions to respond appropriately to the world. From this perspective, the value of emotional aptness is truly native to the affective domain. Appreciating this point may help to motivate the philosophical analysis of affective injustice. While many of the injustices related to the value of subjective well-being described in the previous section are commonly included in standard accounts of injustice and autonomy rights, we can expect that there will be a distinctive role for the analysis of affective injustice—which focuses on the ways that our emotional lives can go well or poorly—to discern the moral urgency of deprivations related to people's participation in the normative practice of emotional aptness, which may have negative effects on a person's emotional life that cannot be reduced to deprivations of subjective well-being.

Another virtue of my suggested approach to the topic of emotional aptness is that it promises to clarify the important interconnections and points of overlap between the normative practices surrounding the aptness of emotions and the *epistemological* practices surrounding the truth-value of beliefs. In the normative practice of emotional aptness, we treat emotions as making truth-evaluable claims about the nature of the evaluative properties present in a given situation, the relative importance of particular evaluative properties, and what sorts of emotional responses they warrant.<sup>14</sup> We treat all of these assessments as requiring evidence and reasons and as subject to challenge on that basis. We view individual participants in the practice as having achieved various levels of expertise and skill with regard to making such assessments, both in general and with respect to particular domains. In these ways, the normative practices surrounding emotional aptness are similar to those surrounding knowledge.

With these points in mind, we may be able to import (more or less directly) concepts, categories, and insights from the philosophical discourse surrounding epistemic injustice to considerations of affective injustice related to deprivations of emotional aptness, including:

- *Affect-related testimonial injustice*, in which a person or group is unfairly subjected to credibility deficits, silencing, smothering—that is, the creation of conditions that strongly encourage or require self-silencing, as in the kind of case discussed by Srinivasan (2018)—and other practices and circumstances that undermine how others give uptake to their affective assessments of things and their views about which emotional responses may be warranted.
- *Affect-related hermeneutical injustice*, in which a person or group's ability to interpret their own and others' affective experiences and emotional responses is unfairly constrained or undermined, for example, by gaslighting or by the unavailability of concepts that would allow them to understand

those experiences and responses, due to the historic exclusion of some groups of people from politics, law, scholarship, journalism, art, and other domains that influence which concepts are widely available.

By clarifying the nature of the normative practice surrounding the affective good of epistemic aptness, both in general and in particular domains and cases, it may be possible to develop these and other points of overlap between affective and epistemic injustice. Such research would thus build on important work that has already been done on the affective dimensions of epistemology and epistemic injustice (e.g., Jagger 1989; Campbell 1997; Shotwell 2011; Medina 2013; Tuana 2017; Glazer 2019).

If it is true that emotional aptness is a fundamental affective good, and that the good of emotional aptness depends on and arises in the context of participation in normative practices that facilitate the mutual correction of emotional responses and the collaborative discovery of evaluative properties, then it may be possible to begin identifying relevant subsidiary goods to which one might have a legitimate claim, or which might be distributed to members of a society in a just or unjust manner. Using the same basic categories used in the previous section to identify subsidiary goods related to the fundamental affective good of subjective well-being, we can identify the following subsidiary goods that may be necessary for the provision of the fundamental affective good of emotional aptness:

- *Affective freedoms*, such as freedom from interference in one's apt emotional responses and in one's participation in the normative practices that facilitate emotional aptness.
- *Affective resources and opportunities*, such as materials, activities, and circumstances that contribute positively to the aptness of one's emotional responses, including education and hermeneutical resources that help one to hone one's emotional responses, and adequate exposure to sufficiently rich, complex, and scaffolded environments that support the development of relevant skills.
- *Affective recognition*, such as being respectfully considered and responded to as a legitimate participant in the normative practice of emotional aptness, and consideration of, and responsiveness to, one's particular needs with regard to the pursuit of emotional aptness.

With this in mind, considerations of affective injustice would arise regarding conditions in which a person or social group is unduly subjected to such things as: negative practical consequences or social sanctions for apt emotional responses, which might give rise to a severely suppressed or inhibited emotional life, either in general or with regard to specific kinds of emotions, such as anger; circumstances that contribute to an emotional life that is impoverished or to a general affective numbing or desensitization to certain evaluative properties, either persistently or for significant or frequent periods of time in which an inflexible mood or a preoccupation with the past or future reduces the range of evaluative properties in the present situation to which one is aptly responsive; circumstances that give rise to trauma, hypersensitivity, or other affective states and conditions that contribute to inapt emotional responses, such as by lashing out at, or getting overly attached to, inappropriate objects; having one's emotional responses misdirected as a result of the influence of an ideology, worldview, or a mistaken understanding of or misguided outlook on particular topics; circumstances that contribute to being unable or unwilling to participate fully in processes of affective education, the correction of one's emotional responses, and the discovery of evaluative properties; and having one's apt emotional responses inappropriately claimed or used by others to inflate their relative standing.

These points may help us to avoid an overly simplistic approach to the topic of extrinsic emotional regulation. There are clearly good reasons to be worried about the harms that might arise when members of oppressed social groups are "told what to feel" (Cherry 2019b). Moreover, Archer and Matheson (2020) are right to warn about the affective injustices arising from "emotional imperialism,"

particularly if the impositions involved in such imperialism severely undermine a person or group's ability to participate in the practice of emotional aptness, or if they are "emotionally manipulated through the unsympathetic or hostile interpretive practices of others" (Campbell 1997, 165). That said, I believe it would be a mistake to understand the injustice in such cases as violations of a person's right to determine their own emotional responses without that response being subjected to correction, such as by being challenged regarding whether the response is warranted. Like Archer and Matheson (2020, 5), I doubt such a right exists. Although such corrections and challenges may be morally objectionable by virtue of being disrespectful, disproportionately directed (e.g., toward women, or toward certain kinds of emotion in men), and so on, the correction and challenging of emotional responses do not seem to be harmful in itself. To the contrary, such correction has been described as a vital expression of love (Emerick 2016), and as I noted above, there is a reason to think that it is a central dimension of our affective education, necessary for achieving a desirable or excellent emotional life. Indeed, *withholding* such correction, or marginalizing certain people within the normative practices of emotional aptness, seems to be at least an equally serious concern regarding the affective harms or disadvantages faced by members of oppressed social groups.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

I have proposed a novel articulation of the general concept of affective injustice, according to which affective injustice is a state in which individuals or groups are deprived of "affective goods" that are owed to them. On this basis, I have offered a method for identifying and analyzing types and cases of affective injustice that begins by establishing which affective goods are fundamental, and then considers which subsidiary goods—such as affective freedoms, affective resources, affective opportunities, and forms of affective recognition—may be necessary for the provision of those fundamental affective goods.

Drawing from ideas in the extant literature and in some cases developing them further, I have offered reasons to think that two such fundamental affective goods include subjective well-being and emotional aptness. These goods represent basic elements of a desirable or excellent emotional life. However, they are not the kinds of goods that can be demanded or directly bestowed or guaranteed. We do not have a right to happiness, but to its *pursuit*, and the same is true of emotional aptness. Accordingly, my approach to the analysis of particular types and cases of affective injustice focuses on deprivations of the subsidiary goods that enable a person to pursue and attain subjective well-being and emotional aptness. It may be hard to see how the fundamental affective goods of subjective well-being and emotional aptness could ever be directly provided by a "distributing agent," but it is relatively clear that the subsidiary affective goods I have discussed—that is, the freedoms, resources, opportunities, and forms of recognition that enable a person to attain subjective well-being and emotional aptness—are routinely distributed by a wide variety of social institutions.

By focusing on the morally objectionable deprivation of such goods, my approach yields an understanding of affective injustice that is multidimensional and temporally extended, in which we are asked to consider not only the current emotional state of a given individual, but also their affective education and emotional development, as well as their capacity to participate in certain kinds of emotional exchanges with others, and which considers not only present realities but also what might be possible in the context of alternative social practices.

*I am grateful for the generous help I received in developing this paper. I would especially like to thank Jake Earl, Trip Glazer, Lori Gallegos de Castillo, Julio Covarrubias, my colleagues at Wake Forest University, and the anonymous reviewers for this journal, for their suggestions and the inspiration and encouragement they provided.*

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For discussions of the emotional burdens of oppression, read Fanon (1952/2008, 1963/2003) and Ahmed (2004, 2006, 2010, 2016). Many other works address the intersection of oppression and particular affective states, including *anger and resentment* (Frye 1983, Lorde 1984/2019, Scheman, 1980, Spelman 1987, hooks 1995, Tessman 2005, ch. 5, Bell 2009, Stockdale 2013, 2021, Cvetkovich 2014, Cherry 2018, 2019a, Tsantsoulas 2020), *shame and pride* (Young 1980, Bartky 1990, Toombs 1995, Skeggs 1997, Shelby 2005, Shotwell 2007, Guenther 2011, Kim 2014, Bergoffen 2018, Salmela 2018, Mun 2019), *fear and distrust* (Snow 2002, Cudd 2006, ch. 6, Bryant-Davis 2007, Carter 2007, Welsh 2013, Sherman 2015, ch. 5, Krishnamurthy 2015, Cherry 2016, García 2019, Razack 2020), *sadness and depression* (Brennan 2004, Butler 2010, Cvetkovich 2012, Park 2015, Oliver 2020), *hope and joy* (hooks 2000, Gilligan 2003, Poe 2015, Solnit 2016, Holmes 2017, West 2018, Norlock 2019), *compassion and care* (Bubeck 1995, Spelman 1997, Bowden 1997, Noddings 2002, Green 2004, Scholz 2008, Cherry 2020), as well as *emotional fragility* (DiAngelo 2011, Liebow and Glazer 2019, Táíwò 2020).
- <sup>2</sup> For an overview of the field and discussions of particular subtopics, read *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (Kidd et al. 2017).
- <sup>3</sup> Another complexity is that the *nature* of emotions and moods remains subject to deep disagreements between theoretical camps (e.g., cognitivist, non-cognitivist, etc.), with consensus nowhere in sight. In this regard, however, affectivity and knowledge are in roughly the same position, insofar as the nature of knowledge also remains subject to deep philosophical disagreements.
- <sup>4</sup> Read Archer and Mills (2019) for a discussion and development of Srinivasan's claim that this double-bind constitutes a "psychic tax." The authors examine four primary strategies of emotional regulation, including situation management, attentional deployment, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation (Gross 1998). They argue that in the context of the kind of double-bind described by Srinivasan, each strategy may cause harm to the person adopting it by causing deprivations of physical well-being and subjective well-being, as well as undermining one's capacity to ensure the aptness of their emotional responses.
- <sup>5</sup> For discussions of the concept of justice, read Sandel 1982, Scanlon 1998, Raphael 2001, and Johnston 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> These formulations of distributive and corrective affective injustice are adapted from analogous notions of distributive and corrective injustice discussed, for example, in Perry 2000. The term "affective rights" arises in Archer & Matheson (2020), as well as in Eileen Johnson's (2012) discussion of a "children's emotional bill of rights."
- <sup>7</sup> Likewise, the constructs of *emotional intelligence* and *emotional regulation*, which are sometimes used to evaluate people's emotional lives, appear to have only instrumental value and so would not be fundamental affective goods. Emotional intelligence has been defined as the ability to perceive, regulate, and harness emotions, both in oneself and in others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al. 1998). Like other forms of intelligence, the value of emotional intelligence would seem to depend on the value of the outcomes such abilities are used to bring about. Emotional regulation has been defined as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross 1998: 275). Emotional regulation is a component of emotional intelligence, and as several philosophers have discussed (Archer & Mills 2019, Cherry 2019b, Liebow & Glazer 2019, Pickard 2019, Sias 2019), the processes that comprise emotional regulation can be used to achieve either beneficial or harmful ends. As such, there is a reason not to describe any of these states or processes as fundamental affective goods.
- <sup>8</sup> This question would seem to be central to Srinivasan's (2018) discussion of affective injustice, which focuses on cases in which a person is forced to choose between the deprivation of subjective well-being and the suppression of apt emotions. However, Srinivasan does not directly address the question of fundamentality with regard to the good of emotional aptness. Nevertheless, her analysis seems to be motivated by the view that the value of emotional aptness cannot be understood merely in terms of its instrumental value for subjective well-being. Indeed, this view would explain why she describes cases in which it is prudent to avoid an apt emotional response as constituting a "normative conflict," i.e., a conflict between two incommensurable kinds of goods, rather than a mere double-bind or trade-off between two things that would each contribute to one's subjective well-being.

- <sup>9</sup> For an extended defense of the view that emotions are necessary for our capacity to appreciate the meaning or significance of things, read Furtak 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> Such an attitude may find at least partial justification in the notion that in some cases, such as if one is trapped in a terrible situation with no hope of escaping, an apt assessment of one's situation would undermine their subjective well-being. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of case Srinivasan (2018) describes, in which the value of emotional aptness is at odds with the value of subjective well-being, insofar as one faces a trade-off between them.
- <sup>11</sup> Taking up Srinivasan's claim that the tension between prudence and emotional aptness constitutes a "normative conflict," Plunkett (2020) argues that we should understand this claim as holding that we have reasons to respond emotionally in an apt manner and that these reasons are not merely consequentialist reasons derived from the instrumental value of such responses with regard to morality, utility, or subjective well-being. Instead, such reasons are non-consequentialist in nature and can be described as "fittingness reasons," insofar as they are generated from the fittingness of a given emotional response to the evaluative property it is responding to. If we have such reasons, this can explain why the kind of cases described by Srinivasan constitute a "normative conflict," here understood as a conflict of different kinds of reasons. However, Plunkett acknowledges that his analysis offers no insights about how to determine the relative weight of such fittingness reasons (9). Moreover, Plunkett's analysis does not clarify why these particular kinds of normative conflicts constitute an injustice; in fact, he notes that he is skeptical that such conflicts are matters of justice (11).
- <sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the claim that emotional responses can be normatively evaluated in light of their constitutive aims or *teloi*, read Gallegos 2020.
- <sup>13</sup> Describing the role of emotions in our capacity for appreciating the significance of evaluative property, Srinivasan (2018, 132) says the following: "I want to suggest that getting angry is a means of affectively registering or appreciating the injustice of the world, and that our capacity to get aptly angry is best compared with our capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Just as appreciating the beautiful or the sublime has a value distinct from the value of knowing that something is beautiful or sublime, there might well be a value to appreciating the injustice of the world through one's apt anger—a value that is distinct from that of simply knowing that the world is unjust." For further discussion of the relationship between emotional practices and art appreciation, read Campbell 1997.
- <sup>14</sup> My analysis here should not be understood to imply or depend on the view that there are, in fact, universal standards of emotional correctness. The claim here is about the nature of the practice of emotional aptness, not the nature of reality: So long as we are participating in the normative practice of emotional aptness, we act *as if* emotions were making truth-evaluable claims about evaluative properties. Moreover, this practice could (and usually does, I suspect) operate on the principle that a relatively wide—though not unlimited—range of emotional responses might be appropriate in any given case, insofar as a variety of evaluative properties are present in the relevant situation.

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**How to cite this article:** Gallegos F. Affective injustice and fundamental affective goods. *J Soc Philos.* 2021;00:1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12428>