

Samuel Lepine, *La nature des émotions. Une introduction partisane*, Vrin: Paris, 2023, 246 pp., 28€, ISBN: 978-2-7116-3080-6

We are now in the age of affectivism (Dukes et al., 2021): while emotions have long been contrasted with cognition, they are now seen as a central element of our rational life. Samuel Lepine joins this paradigm, arguing that emotions are cognitive states, source of axiological knowledge, and even an essential component of values.

Lepine's original contribution consists of an extremely cautious and impressive interweaving of psychological and philosophical discussions of emotions as well as of values. We may take from *La nature des émotions* a set of entangled statements: (i) emotions are *cognitive states* distinguished by their *evaluative* nature; (ii) they are sui generis psychological modes that *focus our attention* and prepare our body for action; (iii) they are evaluative since we can ascribe a *correspondence* between the emotion and the value instantiated by the emotion's intentional object (i.e., correctness conditions); (iv) the correctness and justification conditions of emotions *partially depend on the background motivations* on which every emotion is based, because (v) values depend on some non-evaluative properties of external objects as well as on the *agents' motivations*. These different points fit together to form the most comprehensive introduction to emotions I've read since Deonna & Teroni's *The Emotions* (2012). Let us examine how.

Chapter (1) outlines the so-called "naive features" of emotions: automaticity, valence, intentionality, direction of fit, cognitive and motivational bases, etc. Chapter (2) focuses on the opposition between emotion and cognition. The notion of cognition is discussed by reference to the debate between Zajonc (1984) and Lazarus (1984). Lepine endorses the appraisal theory of emotions in psychology (Lazarus' view), arguing that (i) emotions are *cognitive states* insofar as stimuli processing in emotions makes them available for semantic processing (p.61), the *evaluative nature* of the processing being the mark of emotions in cognition (pp.59-60).

Chapters (3) and (4) explore the evaluative nature of emotions. Lepine first wonders whether emotions constitute a natural kind. Chapter (3) sets out Griffith's (1998) well-known objections to the idea that emotions share essential properties, coupled with considerations

coming from constructivist theories (e.g., Russell, 2003). Lepine concludes, in line with the appraisal theory, that “emotions would indeed constitute a natural kind insofar as each of them share the function of detecting a specific core relational theme.” (p.87; I translate all quotations).<sup>1</sup>

Chapter (4) then explores philosophical theories of emotions to further understand the notion of a *core relational theme*. According to Lepine, this notion is analogous to what philosophers call “formal objects” (pp.108-109). A dog, a steep cliff, losing my money in the stock market, and my Ph.D. supervisor are objects I mention when answering the question “What are you afraid of?” – they are the *intentional objects* of my fear. What do they have in common (when my fear is appropriate)? They all instantiate the same evaluative property, being dangerous. Danger is, thus, the *formal object* of fear. How are formal objects connected to emotions? Lepine follows Deonna and Teroni’s (2012, 2015, 2022) attitudinal view of emotions, according to which: (ii) emotions are sui generis *psychological modes* (i.e., they are reducible neither to judging, nor to perceiving, and so on)<sup>2</sup> constituted by unified bodily feelings that prepare the subject for action – e.g., fear prepares me to flee. Most importantly, (iii) the content of emotions need not be evaluative; the evaluative nature of emotions lies in the *fittingness relation* between fear, shame, pride... and the evaluative properties instantiated by the intentional object of these emotions. In other words, the content of my emotion doesn't need to go beyond a non-evaluative representation of the intentional object – “the dog”, “the steep cliff”, etc.

Lepine illustrates this relationship by interpreting the attitudinal theory through Robert Cummins’ (1996) analysis of psychological attitudes. Attitudes are characterized by their cognitive function<sup>3</sup>; the attitude sets a target and processes its content in a way that is correct when the target is reached:

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<sup>1</sup> We may regret that Lepine does not raise more vigorous objections to appraisal theory as he does to other ones. For example, it is unclear whether appraisals cause or constitute emotions (Moors, 2013; Roseman & Smith, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Chapter (4) also discusses perceptual, judgmental, mixed views, etc. These discussions are close to those of Deonna & Teroni (2012, Chapters 5-6). It is unfortunate that some recent approaches (e.g. Mitchell, 2021; Müller, 2019) are not covered.

<sup>3</sup> Here, the term “function” refers to a representational function *à la* Dretske. In this sense, emotions can be said to represent values. Yet, the attitudinal view argues that values do not feature in the *content* of emotions.

My emotion of fear implies an evaluation of the dog as dangerous: I apply to the content of my representation (the dog) a target (dangerousness). And this emotion is correct if it targets a state of affairs that fits with the mobilized representation, i.e. if dangerousness (the target) is indeed one of the properties of the represented dog (the content). (p.134)

A refinement of the attitudinal theory is then developed to circumvent the common objection that emotions are not reducible to bodily feelings (Goldie, 2000; Mitchell, 2021). Lepine insists on the way emotions *direct our attention* on aspects of the intentional object and considers that, at least in the case of mild emotions, we need to focus on this rather than on bodily feelings (p.139). He argues that attention is a necessary component as well, and sometimes more salient than the bodily component (p.141, see also Deonna & Teroni, 2015).

This elegant (and plausible!) refinement makes sense of the idea that bodily feelings are directed toward the external world – since they accompany and are calibrated by an attentional mechanism. In addition, just as Brady (2013), Lepine can explain how emotions, while not representing values in their content, lead us to focus on natural properties in the world that constitute the basis for an understanding of values (p.143).

Chapter (5) focuses on the correctness conditions of emotions and, therefore, on what it means for an emotion to fit a value. In a new and stimulating way, Lepine contrasts an *independentist* view with a *motivational* view of correctness. According to the first view – attributed to Tappolet (2016) and D’Arms & Jacobson (2000) –, correctness is determined solely by the natural properties instantiated by the intentional object of the emotion. For instance, my sense of humor is irrelevant to determine the correctness of my amusement at Julie’s joke; the only thing we need to consider is whether the joke is objectively funny. Lepine rejects this analysis and suggests that (iv) the correctness of emotions also depends on their *congruence with our “background motivations”* – i.e., desires, preferences, feelings, character traits... – as well as the coherence of these motivations, as we shall see later (p.192).

There are psychological and axiological elements in Lepine’s view. On the psychological side, motivations are considered as a necessary base of emotions (p.163, see also Baier, 2004; Roberts, 2003). On the axiological side, Lepine adopts (v) a form of (neo-) *sentimentalism* according to which values are understood in terms of appropriate emotions (p.151) – e.g., injustice is what deserves indignation (Brentano, 1902). Thus, if appropriate emotions underlie values, and if emotions are based on motivations, then (by transitivity)

motivations underlie values (at least partially). This leads to a *subjectivist view* of values: it is only when x's natural properties are prized by humans (or sentient creatures) that x deserves pro-attitude A and thus is good.

Note that Lepine considers that motivations are themselves subject to correctness conditions: motivations are considered correct until proven otherwise, i.e. until they contradict our experience, higher-order beliefs, or (social, prudential, moral...) norms (p.180). It is thus difficult to possess racist motivations without encountering contradictions (p.182). Motivationalism is thus a naturalist view on value which occupies a middle ground between “raw” subjectivism and naïve realism.

Finally, in chapter (6), Lepine argues that the justification of emotions is also impacted by motivations. The independentist argues that emotions are justified when we can mention natural properties on which the corresponding value may supervene (“Why am I afraid of that dog? Did you see its teeth, its bloodshot eyes, its lowered tail?!”). The motivationalist replies that subjective motivations also play a justificatory role – as we shall see later.

In the very last section of *La nature des émotions*, Lepine attempts to demonstrate that emotions, despite their subjective nature, are a trustworthy tool for evaluative judgment (p.224). Contrary to the idea that emotions are prone to many “false positives” (see Goffin, 2021), Lepine argues that even when we “confabulate” to justify our (inappropriate) emotions, these confabulations are relatively plausible (p.218) and should not prevent us from trusting our emotions most of the time (p.224).

Considering the author's clear view on emotions and values, I may suggest only a few challenges aimed at extending the discussion he proposed.

Among these challenges, we might mention that Lepine does not substantiate his parallel between core relational themes and formal objects. Yet, as Teroni (2023) points out, psychologists have a hard time reconciling the core relational theme or “molar value” (such as injustice, dangerousness, sublime...) and the “molecular values” targeted by each appraisal check (such as relevance, urgency, power...). Since psychologists tend to subjectivize molecular

values, this might confer an advantage to the motivational view, as long as the shifts between molecular value, molar value and, finally, formal object are conceptually possible.

Another challenge concerns both psychological and axiological motivationalism. The two aspects seem inseparable in Lepine's mind, and this, in my opinion, implies that adopting motivationalism carries a lot of presuppositions. For instance, we find very little argument against the realist approaches of values except the evocation of one aspect of the queerness of values (Mackie, 1977): isn't it odd that an "objective" property of the world (value) has motivating or normative power (pp.169-170)? The motivational view dissolves this issue, but it is far from being the only solution (see Enoch, 2011) and it comes with costs and concessions.

Consider the cost at the psychological level. A direct and acknowledged consequence of motivationalism is that there can be no such thing as emotional discoveries (p.167, p.173). Just as Sartre (1940) claimed that we can never discover anything with imagination other than what we've put into it, Lepine maintains that we never acquire new motivations by feeling an emotion. This is questionable. Consider Pablo being forced to attend Opera – a musical genre he has no motivation to listen to. However, this time, he is touched; from now he is willing to come back every month and add opera playlists on Spotify. According to Lepine, Pablo's emotion necessarily arises from a pre-existing motivational basis. At a certain degree of generality, this is indisputable: maybe Pablo has a preference or a desire for music (in general), Beauty, or pleasant moments. Yet, this seems to miss the point raised by scholars acknowledging the possibility of emotional discoveries. If we work with a fine-grained notion of motivation, we seem to acquire new specific interests or re-evaluate (quite radically) states of affairs thanks to our emotions. The only replies available to Lepine are either to assume that emotions that are not based on preexisting motivations are inappropriate (see p.185, p.222) or that the relevant specific motivations are unconscious (see p.188). This is unfortunate considering that the latter is painfully ad hoc, whereas the former clashes with cases of "outlaw emotions" that seem fitting even though they contrast with our personality (Silva, 2021). Now, if Lepine rejects the fine-grained approach, one might ask why congruence with background motivations should count as correctness conditions (p.192): a condition that cannot be incorrect is incongruent with common understanding of correctness conditions.

At the axiological level, the motivational approach is convincing when we consider personal values (see Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2007). For instance, my disappointment at a friend's betrayal may be justified by my 20-year attachment to that friend (see Bell, 2011). It is so, because betrayal is the kind of value that depends on a relationship, it cannot be instantiated between two strangers. But when we consider impersonal values, motivationalism loses its panache. Epistemic values, for example, hardly seem to depend on our motivations. Invoking a subjective motivation to justify an epistemic emotion comes across as odd – my astonishment at discovering a mathematical demonstration cannot be justified by my passion for Pythagoras. This provides a psychological explanation of the emotion (someone who does not share my passion for Pythagoras would not have been astonished), not a *justification*, which depends e.g., on whether there are reasons to think that the proof is sound and noteworthy.

Lepine is aware that motivationalism blurs the justification/explanation contrast (p.200) and might reply that impersonal values are based on interests shared by all mankind (see p.174). I disagree, because I think that impersonal values render the world better for human beings even when they have currently no motivation to promote them. In the world depicted by the movie *Idiocracy* – where the planet's foolishhest inhabitants have reproduced in large numbers to the point of engendering a society with no culture or historical knowledge – , nobody is motivated to acquire knowledge. I would not say, however, that knowledge has no value in this world. People are just wrong! You may say that they *should* be motivated by knowledge. Then, if knowledge possesses a value not because people have motivations, but because knowledge deserves to motivate them, we lose the motivationalist view on the way and go back to the pure (neo-)sentimentalism.

Samuel Lepine's monograph is subtitled "une introduction partisane": it is introductory in the noblest and most exciting sense of the word, it offers an overview of affective topics in philosophy and psychology, without detracting from the precision and complexity of the debates. Written in crystal-clear French (guarantee without any trace of Sorbonnian style!), *La nature des émotions* results in a conceptually plausible and empirically supported defense of the appraisal theory, the attitudinal view (re-visited), and the motivational view (introduced here).

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