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A guide to moral knowledge. The epistemic role of moral emotions

Abstract

In this paper, I defend the epistemic role of moral emotions. After some introductory remarks, by making use of an attitudinal theory of emotions, I claim that emotions are to be conceived as intentional states directed towards evaluative properties in the world, and have therefore both correctness conditions and justification conditions. Then, I define and list moral emotions, and I defend the objective status of evaluative and moral properties. Such preliminary moves allow me to make my main point. Firstly, when discussing the standards to assess if moral emotions' formal object can be counted as an epistemic one, I propose a threefold intentionality theory of moral emotions, which allows me to equate their secondary formal objects to those of epistemic emotions. Secondly, when considering the roles moral emotions must play in order to be counted as epistemically relevant, I defend both the direct justificatory role and the indirect motivational role of moral emotions.

Keywords

Epistemic emotions, Moral emotions, Moral knowledge

It is almost commonplace to say that recent decades, from the 80s onwards, have witnessed a resurgence of interest – after a long neglect – in the research on emotions, and on the link between emotions, formation of judgements, and thought. Within such general trend, the role of emotions in judgement formation has been explored in relation to different fields of knowledge, and has led to the recognition of a specific kind of knowledge-related emotions, i.e., epistemic emotions, such as intellectual courage, generosity, humility, and so on² (Morton 2010). These are “emotions that play an im-

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² A more complete list would include curiosity, interest, surprise, trust, feeling of knowing, feeling of familiarity, feeling of forgetting, tip of the tongue feeling, feeling of certainty, feeling of doubt (Meylan 2014).

portant role in our attempts to acquire beliefs correctly” (Morton 2010: 2), or, more specifically, “emotions that are specifically directed at epistemic ends” (Morton 2010: 2). Much work is being done to highlight the role played by epistemic emotions in epistemic activities such as deliberation, beliefs’ revision and inquiry. However, a similar effort seems to be lacking for what concerns the epistemic role of other kinds of emotions, and, among others, of moral emotions, such as shame, pride, admiration, and all the emotions directly related to the appreciation of value and to the formation of moral reasoning and judgements. Though it has been very much stressed how far moral emotions do contribute to the disclosure of value(s) and/or moral principles, less has been said about how such disclosure may amount to an improvement of the agent’s moral knowledge, or help her moral cognitive abilities and activities, and, therefore, the corresponding emotions may be said to play an epistemic role. The purpose of this paper is filling such gap, arguing for a link between the research carried out on moral emotions in philosophy and psychology, and the advancement of the study of epistemic emotions. The importance of such move is not limited to the theoretical level. Besides making a conceptual point, I believe my argument can prove powerful as for its practical potentialities, especially those concerning the motivational role played by moral emotions. As I will show at §4.3 and stress in the conclusion of the paper, developing (some families of) moral emotions might be a cutting-edge answer to the pressing question about how to trigger interest in publicly relevant issues.

In what follows, I firstly make a premise (§1) concerning the account of emotions I make use of. There, I embrace an attitudinal theory of emotions, and I claim that emotions are to be conceived as intentional states directed towards evaluative properties in the world, and have therefore both correctness conditions and justification conditions. After such explanation, at §2, I define moral emotions and I list them. Then, I defend the objective status of evaluative properties and moral properties (§3). At §4, I argue for moral emotions’ epistemic role by discussing the standards (§4.1) to assess if their formal object can be counted as an epistemic one, and the roles moral emotions must play in order to be counted as epistemically relevant (§4.2, §4.3). At the end of this path, I conclude by highlighting some practical implications of my argument.

1. *What is an emotion*

Before outlining my main argument, I need to explain the account of emotions I will make use of. As to how emotions are to be conceived, various stances can be taken. It would be beyond the scope of this paper addressing them all at length; it seems enough to say that I will here move from a perspective rooted in the attitudinal theory of emotions. Unlike evaluative judgement theories (see Nussbaum 1994, Sorabji 2003, Roberts 2003), that assimilate emotions to evaluative judgements³, and the “Jamesian” family of the perceptual theories (see Damasio 2000, Prinz 2004, Goldie 2000, Tappolet 2000, 2016, Deonna 2006, and, in a weaker form, Zagzebski 2003), that consider emotions as essentially felt, and assimilate them to perceptions⁴, the attitudinal theory of emotions equates emotions with “distinct attitudes towards the objects provided by their cognitive bases” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 89). Each emotion, according to this perspective, “consists in a specific felt bodily stance towards objects or situations, which is incorrect as a function of whether or not these objects and situations exemplify the relevant evaluative property” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 89). This theory shares in the emphasis of perceptual theories on the felt character of emotions, as well as in their way of accounting for the intentionality and phenomenology of emotions. However, it also seems to avoid successfully their weaknesses, as well as to make sense of the phenomenology of emotions in a more compelling way.

³ Evaluative judgement theories seem to have an advantage as for the specification of the correctness conditions, as well as the justification conditions of emotions. However, a number of objections may be raised against them. To put it briefly, it does not seem compelling to claim that an evaluative belief is a necessary and sufficient condition for an emotion to arise, and many counterexamples can be provided against such claim. For a detailed discussion, see Deonna and Teroni (2012: 52-61).

⁴ Doubtless, contemporary perceptual theories, by assimilating emotions to direct perceptions of values, easily account for their justificatory power, i.e. their being potential reasons for the corresponding evaluative judgements (as we will see in more detail at §4.2). However, they fail to take into adequate account the significant differences between perceptions and emotions, and deny the need of reasons for emotions to be justified, risking therefore to fall into an intuitionism about evaluative properties, and to posit “a mysterious perceptual or quasi-perceptual relation to values” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 71).

Grounding on the attitudinal theory of emotions, it is possible to outline an account of the general traits of emotions. Emotions differ from other psychological states, such as moods, sentiments, desires, traits and virtues. They are “episodes that have a felt character and are directed at particular objects provided by their cognitive bases” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 11). Let us deepen this definition a little. First, similarly to desires, they are felt, i.e., they involve bodily sensations or feelings, which represent a reaction to some objects; unlike desires, however, they seem to be closely related to evaluative judgements, and, most importantly, to be intentional states, i.e. to have a “mind-to-world direction of fit” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 6), a respect under which they are closer to perceptions than to desires. They are therefore susceptible of being correct or incorrect, rather than satisfied or unsatisfied: i.e., they can attach to a proper intentional object, or they can fail to do it. In other words, they “have a content in the light of which it is possible to assess whether they fit the facts or not” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 71).

However, unlike perceptions, emotions can turn out to be justified or unjustified, meaning that the agent experiencing an emotion – say, fear – may turn out to have or lack good reasons to depict (and thus experience) a situation as such (say, fearful). From this perspective, they share more in the nature of beliefs, which stand in need of reasons, than in that of desires, or even perceptions. To sum up, emotions have both correctness conditions and justification conditions, logically independent from each other, but both dependent on their being directed to particular objects and related to evaluative properties.

2. *Moral emotions: a sketch*

Within the general resurgence of interest for emotions, and for the role they play in judgement formation, a substantial place is occupied by moral emotions, i.e., emotions directly related to the appreciation of moral value, such as shame, pride, admiration, etc. A good definition of moral emotions would label them as “self-evaluative, self-conscious or other-oriented emotions in response to morally salient situations” (Malti-Dys 2015), related with one’s evaluative judgments and appraisals, and which can be positively or negatively valenced (see Malti and Latzko 2012, Tracy *et al.* 2007). Even if some debate is

still taking place on the exact way to distinguish moral and non-moral emotions, it is now widely accepted that moral emotions would be emotions whose evaluative formal object instantiates a certain moral value (see Cova, Deonna and Sander 2015: 397).

To sum up, emotions cannot be treated as a whole: even if they share in a common nature, a remarkable difference can be found between those states which are addressed towards an evaluative property simply speaking (such as fearfulness, dangerousness, etc.), and those that are directed, more specifically, to moral properties, be they principles, values, or norms. A growing attention is being devoted to such phenomena, both in the psychological⁵ and philosophical field, where emotions in general – and the moral ones in particular – are becoming increasingly central, at the expenses of the solitary, leading role once played by reason and moral reasoning, and occupy different places in morality, depending on the theory of emotion embraced (see §1).

When it comes to listing moral emotions, the research of Jonathan Haidt is a landmark. In his 2003 work, he defines moral emotions as “those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent”, and he singles out four families of moral emotions: the other-condemning family, the self-conscious family, the other-suffering family, and the other-praising family. Emotions belonging to the other-condemning family (contempt, anger, and disgust), act as “guardians of the moral order”, in that they are elicited by violations of the moral order, and they make people conform to social rules. Anger is a response to unjustified insults, as well as to “frustration and goal blockage mixed with more moral concerns about being betrayed, insulted, and treated unfairly” (Haidt 2003); it may well elicit selfish and antisocial actions, but its point being redressing injustice, it may also be elicited by situations where the self is not involved, and it may motivate the desire for a restoration of justice on behalf of the offended part. Disgust, on which so much has been said, can be described as a “guardian of the temple of the body” (Haidt, Rozin, McCauley and

⁵ In this paper, I choose to let many psychological questions unaddressed, such as those concerning the emergence and development of moral emotions, as well as questions raised in many fields other than philosophy, such as neuroscience, economy, genetics, and sociology. On the crucial question of the naturalness of moral emotions, vs their resulting from social conditioning, as well as on their evolutionary or biological rootedness, see De Sousa 2001.

Imada 1997, Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 1993), for “it is triggered by people who violate local cultural rules for how to use their bodies, particularly in domains of sex, drugs, and body modification” (Haidt and Hersh 2001, MacCoun 1998). It aims at ostracizing those who jeopardizes the moral order, and in doing so its ultimate action tendency can be seen as a prosocial one, i.e., the preservation of the moral order.

Contempt, finally, is a “downward” gaze towards some individual, in light of their moral inferiority, or of the gap between the position one holds in society, and their moral worth. It involves “looking down on someone and feeling morally superior” (Haidt 2003, see also Izard 1977).

The second family of moral emotions listed by Haidt is the self-conscious family, which comprises shame, embarrassment, and guilt, i.e., emotions which help people to “monitor and constrain their own behaviour”, in order to avoid “triggering the contempt, anger, and disgust of others” (Haidt 2003). While embarrassment arises from the awareness of the violation of some social (non-moral) convention, shame “is [...] typically elicited by one’s own perceived violation of a moral norm” (Haidt 2003, see also Keltner and Buswell 1996, Tangney, Miller, Flicker and Barlow 1996). The same holds for guilt, which is caused by “the violation of moral rules and imperatives”. Guilt can be distinguished from shame for its specificity, since it does not appraise the whole self as bad, but only the specific action at stake. All the three emotions of these family are said to motivate action tendencies directed at making up for one’s faults, or conforming to the violated moral order. Compassion is the only emotion belonging to the other-suffering family. Often mistakenly confused with empathy or sympathy, compassion is the emotion of “being moved by another’s suffering”, and its moral nature is to be found mainly in its conceptual link with guilt, and in its direct pro-social tendency, in that it makes people want to “help, comfort, or otherwise alleviate the suffering of the other” (Haidt 2003, see also Batson, O’Quinn, Fuly, Vanderplass and Isen 1983, Batson and Shaw 1991).

Finally, emotions which belong to the other-praising family (gratitude and elevation) have good deeds and moral exemplars as their formal objects; unlike the previous (mostly) negatively valenced emotions, they do not activate in the presence of a fault or a violation, but in positive cases where moral value is displayed. Therefore, they are positively valenced, and seem to relate more directly with positive

values. Among them, the emotion Haidt calls “elevation” – sometimes discussed under the name of admiration⁶ – might be argued to be “the most prototypical moral emotion of all” (Haidt 2003). While gratitude is elicited by deeds which benefit the self, Haidt’s elevation is an uninterested state, in that it arises in the presence of a moral exemplar and/or a moral deed which does not benefit the self, and it seems to be elicited by the beauty of the moral in itself.

3. *Against subjectivism about evaluative and moral properties*

At this point, before arguing for the epistemic role of moral emotions, another remark is needed in light of what I have just claimed about the nature of emotions and moral emotions. Talking of correctness conditions and justification conditions of emotions, as I have just done, implies holding a form of objectivism about evaluative properties (as for emotions in general) and about moral properties (as for moral emotions). Indeed, only the claim that evaluative properties exist independently of emotional responses allows to elaborate an account of the conditions under which emotions may be thought to be correct and justified. Also, a defence of the objectivity and antecedence of value is needed, if one wants to avoid the view according to which emotions are mere projections of subjective desires on a neutral, valueless world⁷. Therefore, this paper defends the cognitive potentialities of emotions in light of objectivism about evaluative properties. Many stances can be taken on the way evaluative properties are related to the natural ones, as well as on the naturalness and reality of moral properties. As for the relationship between evaluative and natural properties, the account I adopt here depicts it in terms of supervenience, claiming that evaluative properties supervene on the

⁶ In a philosophical perspective, Zagzebski (2015) has been among the first who favored a retrieval of admiration after a long neglect. In her recent works, she argues, against Aristotle, that admiration is a pleasant other-praising emotion directed to moral excellence. Following Kristjansson, she distinguishes between Pleasant Admiration (PA), Admiring Envy (AE) and Spiteful Envy (SE). Her pioneering work, however, is admittedly in need of further theoretical and empirical support. On the other hand, in the psychological literature the topic of admiration has been only partially and mainly indirectly taken into account (e.g. van de Ven-Zeelenberg 2009, van de Ven *et al.* 2011, van de Ven *et al.* 2015).

⁷ See Antonaccio 2001.

natural ones, while being *sui generis* and distinct from them (see Deonna and Teroni 2012: 50).

Some more explanation needs to be provided regarding moral properties. We have seen that evaluative properties (such as dangerousness) supervene on the natural ones, while remaining distinct. However, things appear to be more complex as for moral properties, whose reality does not seem to be “there”, like the dangerousness of the dog is, and whose assessment seems to depend on something more than describing certain features or natural properties of a given situation (unless we buy some form of *naïf* realism or of quite radical moral naturalism). When it comes to establishing the correctness conditions of moral emotions, we can distinguish between five main positions on the matter of the relation between moral emotions and moral properties: extreme Subjectivism, Foundationalism, Naturalism, Axiologism, and extreme Objectivism (De Sousa 2001: 116). What I embrace here, is the “axiological hypothesis” about moral emotions, which, unlike both extreme Subjectivism and Objectivism, claims that the “order of reality to which emotions give us access is the relatively objective world of human values” (De Sousa 2001: 120), meaning that “the realities revealed by emotions are local to certain organisms in certain environments”, and therefore combining a certain degree of objectivity with the claim that “there is no independent access to the world revealed by emotion” (De Sousa 2001: 120). As for the relationship between natural and moral properties, the axiological hypothesis leads to a further view, i.e. axiological holism. Axiological holism has it that judging whether an emotion is referring to a genuine moral property or value is a task that cannot be performed by appealing to an external criterion, and is rather a matter of applying reflexive equilibrium, and comparing the perceptual information provided by moral emotions with information provided by other emotions, as well as with reasons, background knowledge, and sense perceptions. Such remarks will prove central when arguing for the epistemic role played by moral emotions in the following section.

4. Which epistemic role for moral emotions?

Given the attitudinal theory I embrace, since moral emotions have a formal object, represented by the action or situation they are elicited

by, in order for them to be correct and justified they have to meet the same conditions as standard emotions. However, at this point we can move a step forward, and ask: can moral emotions be the source of moral knowledge, rather than only being correct and/or justified in light of a pre-existent moral knowledge? Or, in other words, can moral emotions be reasons, besides having reasons? Generally speaking, we might answer: not only are moral emotions forms of sensitivities to norms, rules, and values, but, more radically, they represent the only way we can appreciate them, via the appreciation of their formal object; they allow us to acknowledge them as norms, rules, and values, and to see their normative force. Is this enough to argue for an epistemic role of moral emotions? The answer to this latter question would surely be negative, without a further clarification of such role. Thus, in order to make sense of it, and to defend a properly epistemic relevance of moral emotions, I need to address two different kind of sub-questions, concerning the standards and roles which allow us to consider an emotion as epistemic. By standards, I mean (as scholars of epistemic emotions generally do) the criteria that need to be met in order to define an emotion as epistemic, and that refer to its intrinsic nature, whereas the roles help us discriminate between epistemic and non-epistemic emotions in terms of the way they contribute (or fail to contribute) to specific epistemic processes, such as belief, judgement formation, and deliberation. If I will succeed in showing that moral emotions respond to analogous standards and play roles which appear similar to that of epistemic emotions, their cognitive and epistemic role will be *ipso facto* proved as well.

4.1. *Standards: primary and secondary formal object*

The question of the standards amounts to asking what counts as epistemic and what does not; or, in other words, according to which criterion an emotion can be said to be epistemic. The typical response to such question makes reference to the object of an emotion. As I have noted, emotions are intentional states. This means that not only do emotions have an object; more precisely, they display a twofold intentionality. That is, they are directed at two distinct objects: a particular object (say, my dog; my lie) and an evaluative property (say, my dog's being dangerous; my lie's being shameful). Such distinction,

besides applying to every emotion, leads also to a criterion to distinguish between epistemic and non-epistemic emotions, i.e., what has been called the Formal Object Standard of Epistemicity (FOS), according to which “an emotion is epistemic if and only if its formal object is an epistemic value” (Meylan 2014). This criterion, *prima facie*, would exclude moral emotions, whose formal objects are other than epistemic values, from the set of epistemic emotions. But, is this the only admissible standard? Or, to put it another way, can really be seen as epistemic only states whose formal object is the truth? The implausibility of the latter claim has led some (e.g. Meylan 2014) to deny the very possibility of talking about epistemic emotions as a natural kind at all, in that there seems to be no emotion directly aimed at truth as its formal object. However, another route is possible. When trying to defend the epistemic status of some epistemic emotions, such as surprise, interest and trust, which do not seem to have the truth as their direct (or primary) formal object, a way of holding their belonging in the same epistemic domain is to show that they hold a specific relation with a final epistemic evaluative property, e.g., that of being true. This strategy, first hinted at by Meylan, has not been taken seriously by any other scholar. However, I think it might prove a useful conceptual tool, and should be developed further. Therefore, following this intuition, I argue that, as for standard emotions, a twofold intentionality theory of emotions holds true, in that each justified emotion (say, my tenderness/fear) may be said to have:

- a particular object (the cuddly/barking dog Riccio);
 - a primary (evaluative) formal object (Riccio’s being cute/dangerous).
- However, as for epistemic and moral emotions things seem to be slightly more complex. In this case, I think a threefold intentionality theory applies, i.e. one which makes sense of their having both a primary and a secondary formal object.

Thus, according to a threefold intentionality theory of epistemic emotions, each justified epistemic emotion has:

- a particular object (the proposition p);
- a primary (evaluative) formal object (p’s being interesting, surprising, etc.);
- a secondary (epistemic) formal object (p’s being interesting, surprising, etc. qua true).

Similarly, a threefold intentionality theory of moral emotions, has in that, in case they are justified, they have:

- a particular object (my lie/X’s outstandingly generous action);

- a primary (evaluative/moral) formal object (my lie's being shameful/X's outstandingly generous action's being admirable);
- a secondary (epistemic) formal object (my lie's being shameful/ X's outstandingly generous action's being admirable qua morally true).

This move, as it is clear, amounts to equate moral emotions' secondary formal objects to those of epistemic emotions. If one accepts it, besides solving the problem of how to treat different epistemic emotions as a whole, one is committed to consider moral emotions as a sub-set of epistemic ones. Thus, introducing a threefold intentionality theory allows hitting two birds with a stone: not only makes it room for the epistemic role of standard and moral emotions, but it also helps the theorists of epistemic emotions themselves facing the challenges posited by the FOS against their representing a natural kind.

4.2. *Reasons for emotions, emotions as reasons: the justificatory role*

Once established that the moral emotions' secondary formal object can be counted as an epistemic one, the second problem I need to address is that of roles. Following Engel, I acknowledge two main kinds of role played by epistemic emotions: a justificatory (i.e., normative) role – which corresponds to the ability to justify our judgments – and a motivational (i.e., non-normative) role, which amounts to an instigation of inquiry, or to a causal influence on the conduct of inquiry, or to a revision of our current doxastic attitudes (i.e. beliefs, suspension of judgements, disbeliefs). The first role, as I shall explain, is a directly epistemic one, whereas the latter has only indirect epistemic consequences. In this first sub-section, I will argue for a justificatory role played by moral emotions, whereas in the following I will claim they have a motivational role (see §4.3).

One way of claiming that emotions play a direct justificatory role is to commit to a (direct or indirect) perceptual theory of emotions, such as Tappolet's and, in a weaker form, Zagzebski's. According to such view, as already stated, emotions are comparable to sensory perceptions. Thus, as Tappolet puts it, they have justificatory power, since "though defeasible, they confer *prima facie* justification to evaluative beliefs, so that these beliefs will play an important role in the assessment of the other beliefs you hold" (Tappolet 2016: 168). This claim fits both with a foundationalist account of justification, and with

a broadly coherentist framework. Also, it can be expressed in Rawlsian terms, by making use of the notion of reflective equilibrium. As Kauppinen has it, beliefs based on emotions represent, in this account, “initially credible starting points in a process of seeking reflective equilibrium” (Kauppinen 2013: 361).

However, important objections may be raised against perceptual theories, the strongest being the undeniable existence of cognitive bases for emotions, which seem primarily “states for which reasons are needed”, rather than “states that provide us with reasons”. Also, perceptual theories are likely to fall into a form of intuitionism about evaluative properties, and to expose to the critiques usually connected to it. Another, far safer, way, is via the attitudinal theory, defended here at §1. Unlike perceptual theories, the attitudinal theory depicts emotions as “attitudes that we adopt towards contents provided by other mental states” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 91), i.e., their cognitive bases. As we have already seen, conceiving of emotions as epistemologically dependent from their cognitive bases best accounts for the possibility of asking why-questions about the emotions, as well as for the fact that emotions, unlike perceptions, appear to be states “for which we have or lack reasons” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 91). However, this does not imply denying that they also play important epistemological roles: since they cause evaluative judgements, although standing in need of justification, they also justify such judgements. They have, therefore, the twofold nature of states both justified and justifying, both having and providing reasons. While the mere occurrence of an emotion is not in itself sufficient to justify the corresponding evaluative judgement, justified emotions – i.e., emotions whose justification depends on the nature of their bases – seem to provide sufficient reasons to make a justified evaluative judgement. Provided, then, that the cognitive bases of my fear make my present emotion of fear both correct and justified (i.e., the perceived dog is really dangerous), my evaluative judgement of the dog as dangerous, issued by my fear of the dog, would be justified. I have, therefore, two routes to justify evaluative judgements: an emotional one, and another bypassing emotions. At this point, one might ask whether emotions are not epistemically redundant, given the existence of another possible route to justify evaluative judgements. But the answer is negative, for, as Deonna and Teroni highlight, “our awareness of the properties that justify our evaluative judgements must often be explained by our emotional sensitivity” (Deonna and

Teroni 2012: 121). Thus, it is only as a matter of principle that evaluative properties can be accessed without the relevant emotional sensitivity, in that we would not even be able to categorize objects in terms of evaluative properties, had we not the relevant emotion.

Emotions, therefore, may be said to represent “a privileged route to the knowledge of the evaluative properties that feature in their respective correctness conditions” (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 121). Thus, they can be well said to play a direct justificatory role, even if a narrower one than that proposed by perceptual theories.

Such remark, which holds true for emotions in general, is even more easily applied to the case of moral emotions, which have moral properties, rather than evaluative ones, as their primary formal object. However, some caution is needed when handling the transition between “standard” non-epistemic emotions and moral ones, as for their justification and correctness conditions. Given their peculiar nature, moral emotions are justified and correct, depending both on the truth of the natural properties the moral ones supervene on, and on that of the moral properties they attach to, as to their proper formal objects. However, establishing the moral truth of a moral property – as noted when introducing the axiological hypothesis at §3 – does not simply involve checking all the relevant facts, or measuring one’s emotion against an external criterion, but has to do with engaging in a moral reflection which, in turn, implies having a fine-tuned sensitivity to the relevant moral reasons, and a set of other well-developed emotions. Even more than in the case of the other emotions, the epistemic access to the relevant moral knowledge is only in principle available by means of mere reason, and normally requires, among other conditions, the possession and exercise of moral emotions, whose correctness qua moral is verifiable only by means of reflective equilibrium.

In sum, despite being justified qua emotions, justified moral emotions, qua moral, do constitute a privileged basis for moral judgments and knowledge, and provide therefore a non-replaceable access to the sphere of moral truth.

4.3. *Epistemic consequences of non-epistemic emotions: the motivational role*

Not only, as we have just seen, do justified moral emotions play a direct justificatory role; in this section, I claim that they also have indirect epistemic consequences, in that they play the non-normative motivational role of generating epistemic emotions as an effect (see Morton 2010: 12).

Indeed, moral emotions broadly conceived – even non-justified ones – can (and very often do) provide our inquiry with motives, or instigate it, and influence its conduct. Also, they may help the revision of our beliefs, or of our doxastic attitudes. Mainly, they can generate interest, a fundamental epistemic emotion, as an effect. Obviously enough, this role is not peculiar of moral emotions, but is shared by other non-epistemic emotions. Just think about how fear motivates one to know more about the features of the situation one is afraid of. My fear of snakes, e.g., provides me with a very strong motivation to be interested in their habitat, hibernation, etc. Due to my fear, I appear to be much more learned on what concerns snakes than any other non-phobic person I know. However, there seem to be other peculiar sub-roles moral emotions can play in addition.

Indeed, moral emotions (or at least some of them) can generate (i) an interest, shared with other non-moral emotions, in knowing the non-moral facts of the situation. Also, they can foster (ii) an interest in knowing why the relevant moral properties supervene on such non-moral facts. Finally, they can further (iii) an interest in knowing more about the moral properties which are their cognitive bases.

Just think about a moral emotion such as, say, compassion for immigrants, which is not only elicited by their suffering, but also by the awareness that they are victims of injustice. It turns out that it may foster my interest in the facts that make the condition of those I pity miserable (their personal history, the political and economic condition of their country of origin, etc.), so as to do what I can to help fix their situation; also, it may make me want to understand why their case is to be pitied, so that I can have reasons to offer to those who keep indifferent to the compassionate deeds of engaged social workers, or (more often) to supporters of political parties which oppose inclusive immigration policies. Finally, it can motivate me undertaking a reflective journey towards a more detailed picture of my

moral landscape, so to understand more about compassion, broadly conceived, and its link with justice or with other central moral and/or political values. This interest, in turn, may generate other epistemic emotions, such as curiosity and surprise for what I discover, and, once obtained the information needed, a feeling of certainty, or, on the other hand, doubt. Therefore, a wide range of epistemic emotions can be generated by a single non-epistemic moral emotion.

The same can be shown for other moral emotions, such as, e.g., elevation. Elevation, as noted earlier, can be seen as the exact opposite of disgust, in that it is elicited by moral beauty. Experiencing elevation “seems to create a more generalized desire to become a better person oneself, and to follow the example of the moral exemplar” (Haidt 2003). It starts an opening process, since it “opens people up to new possibilities for action and thought, making them more receptive” (Haidt 2003). Besides motivating prosocial behaviour, elevation seems therefore to represent a deeply knowledge-related moral emotion. Not only does it reveal the moral value embodied by the exemplars who elicit it; it also fosters emotional dispositions such as curiosity, interest, and openness.

Also, being awe’s moral counterpart, it has surprise as one of its constitutive traits. Feeling elevated by, say, Oskar Schindler’s deeds, makes me want to know more about the relevant facts (the condition of Polish Jews during the Nazi occupation). Also, it provides me with an increased interest in the values involved, as well as in their violation, and in the ways of preventing such violations in the future. Such deepening process may involve the activation of other epistemic and moral emotions: anger, contempt, or disgust for the awful facts I come across; compassion for the victims of such injustices; elevation for other people whose courageous deeds helped save lives; and, such as in the previous compassion example, curiosity or surprise, certainty or doubt, and an increased knowledge of my own set of values and beliefs.

5. Conclusion

The examples provided highlighted the importance of both moral and (properly) epistemic emotions for belief revision, opening, self-knowledge and self-awareness, as well as for moral motivation and

action. Therefore, the conclusion of this paper is twofold. From a theoretical standpoint, I think the arguments provided showed with enough clarity that moral emotions can be counted as epistemically relevant, in that they meet the standards, and play the two main roles, ascribed to epistemic emotions. Secondly, at a practical level, as the analysis of the motivational role has suggested, developing (at least some families of⁸) moral emotions proves to be both an extremely powerful way of triggering interest in publicly relevant issues, and a unique way of fostering self-reflection, moral motivation, and pro-social behaviour.

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⁸ Assessing and explaining for which families or which particular emotions this claim holds true would require a different paper. For the purposes of the present one, it seems enough to prove that at least some moral emotions can play this important motivational role.

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