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ON SO-CALLED NEGATIVE EMOTIONS*

I started working on aspects of the title issue early on with my Ph.D. project late in 1990². Since then I have kept to the idea that there are no such things as negative (or positive) emotions³ by themselves. A direct impulse to present my thoughts as they appear below is a recent discussion with relevance to this issue on the International Society for Research on Emotion (ISRE) forum. I begin with a brief presentation of its content, then proceed to references to philosophers of the past. In the concluding part I show where talk about negative (as well as positive) emotions originate at all and in what sense they are usually so described, and outline my own position on how to evaluate – if at all – affective phenomena more accurately.

1.

The discussion in November 2013⁴ started with a remark Tom Scheff made on *Jerry Parrott's idea of positive aspects of negative emotions*. In Scheff's view, *it points to a still more general hypothesis: all emotions are positive, to the extent that they are instantly resolved. That is, emotions are like breathing: they are only painful when they are blocked.*⁵

That called forth comments by Louise Sundararajan, who seems to equate the positive with pleasure⁶, and next from Ross Buck, who firmly claimed that:

* Some elements of this paper have been presented at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Apr. 29, 2014. I am grateful to Professor Purificación Sánchez Zamorano for her invitation and judicious remarks.

² A part of it was published in: R. Zaborowski, *Co to jest uczucie? O wielopoziomowości uczucia*.

³ Usually, I prefer to speak about *feeling* – and do so in my papers – rather than *emotion*. For more on this matter see e.g. R. Zaborowski, *From Thumos to Emotion and Feeling ...*. Here, however, I will not be insisting on this so much as to abstain myself from the word *emotion*.

⁴ See <http://lists.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A1=ind1311&L=ISRE-L#5>.

⁵ Nov. 3, 2013 [emphasis mine]. He went on saying: *This idea follows from the idea that emotions at base are preparations for bodily actions, as in Dewey's attitude theory of emotions. For example, grief is bodily preparation to cry that has been delayed.*

⁶ Nov. 3, 2013. See also: *As a forensic psychologist, I know only too well what you are talking about, Tom. Some of my patients tell me that it was a pleasure to kill someone when they were ripping mad, but it is a truth that they are too embarrassed to admit, so they attribute it to their psychosis.*

There are no negative emotions. Emotions are informative, and sometimes they inform us of negative events. [...] The very common notion of “negative emotions” is one of the greatest errors of the field...¹.

Ross got comments (1) from Cecilea Mun who claimed, among others, that

[...] all emotions are functionally beneficial in some form or another [...] So, some emotions can be said to be “negative” in terms of being necessarily or characteristically associated with a negative valence or phenomenological quality, but still be said to be desirable at times in certain contexts or situations? Something like masochism comes to mind. [...] there might be some reason to suggest that emotions and preferences are not appropriately analogous in order to draw conclusions about one from conclusions about the other. Also, if it is true that preferences/desires and valence can come apart, then this opens the door to the question of what, exactly, drives our desires/preferences if not, ultimately, those positive or negative qualities that we associate with our experiences. Or perhaps valence is not so simple after all. Maybe there are different types of positive and negative valences, one set for preferences, one set for emotions, another for, maybe, sensations?²

and, independently, from (2) Remy Debes who:

[...] simply do[es]n’t know how to interpret [Ross’] sweeping denial of negative emotions without a definition of “negative.” It seems [...] as proof of a “positive” emotion either (1) the existence of some pleasure (e.g. as when watching a horror movie); and/or (2) some fitness enhancing consequence of the emotion (e.g. because so-called negative emotion E provides some “information”).

Then Debes insisted that *without knowing what substantive theory of negativity/positivity we are talking about, we can say nothing about [h]ow does merely being a vehicle of “information” speak to the subject of theories about negativity/positivity in the first place.* Debes concluded that

condition 1 could be a mere concomitant of the emotion and not essential to the emotion (e.g. I have

¹ Nov 4, 2013 [emphasis mine]. [...] = *The emotional qualia in themselves tend to be interesting aliments, in the Piagetian sense. The reality that negative emotions are actually positive is proved when people pay good money to be made sad, afraid, angry, and even grief-stricken by tearjerkers, horror shows, and action films.*

² Nov. 4, 2013 [emphasis mine].

a desire to be made scared, which accounts for the pleasure, although the fear remains undesirable in itself). But if so, surely that wouldn't be sufficient reason for deciding the question of "negativity." So at a minimum you'd have to rule out cases of concomitant or even accidental pleasure, and in turn cook up some more plausible examples...at least, if you are going to pump my intuitions. I won't speak for others.¹

Debes got no more comments. Mun did, from Digby Tantam focusing on

some emotions, like nostalgia or depression, [that] are designed to incapacitate and block action. [...] I don't think that we can then say that emotions are always 'positive'. Perhaps the harmful emotions are those that magically transform the world (to use Sartre's concept) in a damaging way; emotions like hate, or resentment.²

and from Vera Shuman, who recalled several studies relevant to that topic³.

Crucial to the above discussion are, in my view, the following elements. First, the claims that are made about the value of emotions. The starting point of the discussion, or where the discussion originated, is the thesis that there are negative emotions. That contention is, in Buck's view, the great error of the field. However, we are not told if negative applies to all of them (n1 = a strong negative thesis) or only to some of them (n2 = a weak negative thesis). Both the strong as well as the weak negative thesis are refuted by Scheff (*all emotions are positive*). Since Scheff adds a qualification⁴ (*to the extent that they are instantly resolved. [...] they are only painful when they are blocked*), I should maybe list his position as a weak positive thesis (p2), as distinct from a strong positive thesis, which is that emotions are always positive (p1), and which is supported by Buck and Mun⁵. With Tantam's denial of p1 (*emotions are [not] always 'positive'*) without a claim that they are always negative, we see another version of a weak position. While Scheff speaks (p2a) about *all* emotions with a qualification as to when they are positive, Tantam claims that (p2b) *some* emotions are positive (and can be never negative ?), while *some* other emotions are negative (and can be never positive ?). Versions p2a, on the one hand, and n2 and p2b, on the other, though different in form, are not

¹ Nov. 4, 2013.

² Nov. 4, 2013 [emphasis mine].

³ *Those interested in the relation between valence and emotions may want to take a look at the existing literature, e.g. Solomon & Stone, 2002: On „positive“ and „negative“ emotions; Colombetti, 2005: Appraising valence; Charland, 2005: The heat of emotion. Valence and the demarcation problem, Shuman, Sander, & Scherer, 2013: Levels of valence.* (Nov. 4, 2013).

⁴ Adding a qualification reminds the approach of the Stoics (see below). Yet, being negative (= irrational, unnatural, excessive, exceeding measure, etc.) is not the same for the Stoics as for Scheff (= painful = blocked).

⁵ Although Mun points to the *functional* benefit of emotions only (?).

mutually contradictory. They are all intermediate positions. Versions n1 and p1 are exclusive, and denial of n1 amounts to p1 while denial of p1 amounts to n1. This, however, would be too simple and, so to speak, one-levelled.

Second, and as a matter of fact, we have to address the more intricate question of the way the labels *positive* and *negative* are understood. This makes the image more complex. As it seems to me, *negative* and *positive* are meant to be in the above quotes one of four things:

- unpleasant vs pleasant *simpliciter*,
- undesirable vs desirable,
- linked to something negative or positive, e.g. symptom or valence,
- negative or positive by consequence of emotion.

In the last criterion, the *consequence* can be, in turn, regarded, on the one hand (d1), as either (d1i) internal or (d1ii) external¹, and, on the other hand (d2), as either (d2i) harmful or (d2ii) beneficial. For example, in this context, an emotion can be considered as always beneficial, hence *internally* positive, because it informs its subject about the world, but, at the same time, it can be *externally* negative if it destroys the world². Whether it is *externally* negative or positive depends on the way it transforms the world. It is harmful when it destroys the world, and it is beneficial when it – or rather the subject of an emotion because of this very emotion – contributes to building the world³. If so, then, *internally*, there are no negative emotions as long as they are informative. Accordingly, if they are always informative, there are no negative – negative *internally* – emotions at all⁴.

The negativity associated with the negative character of a piece of information itself is not relevant for the value of emotion as such, whose crucial feature is that of being informative. In other words, being informative prevails over the negativity of the information itself. Because of *when informative, then beneficial*, emotions are positive. But, *externally*, they can be negative when they contribute to transforming the world by destroying the world⁵. How, then, can one determine their overall value, and speak about their overall value? For example, if emotions are externally negative by their consequence – say Tantam's *incapacitat[ing] and block[ing] action* – shouldn't they be blocked in turn (the case of *nostalgia or depression*), even though they are informative of some features of the world experienced in that emotion? And if so, wouldn't they then be negative, and recognized as such

¹ *Externally* can refer to the external aspect of the subject of experienced emotion. *External* in this sense refers mainly to other people, though people can be understood in a more or less restricted way (e.g. only few in numbers, many people, the major part of society, etc.). Internal/external distinction can probably be glossed as self-/other-regarding. I owe this remark to Purificación Sánchez Zamorano.

² Or, we could add, if it destroys the subject itself. This is, after all, the case of hatred, for instance. Hatred can be internally negative if it persists for a long time in life, because it engulfs the subject and ends up transforming the person and their view of things for the worse.

³ I leave aside the question if an emotion can be *neither* harmful *nor* beneficial.

⁴ Mun would probably say that there are no emotions *functionally* negative.

⁵ If we agree with this, then we should assume that emotion is not only experienced, and experiencing an emotion is not only a matter of being acted upon, but it is also a matter of acting upon and results in an action. Without going into details we could probably say that some emotions present this character while some do not.

by Scheff who makes the reservation that blocked emotions are painful? But would Scheff agree that painful emotions are negative? Furthermore, if it is true, as Mun claims, that *all emotions are functionally beneficial*, what about Tantam's example of *hate, or resentment that transform the world [...] in a damaging way*? Is their being beneficial secondary to their transforming the world in a damaging way in evaluating emotions and, consequently, should we think that even if an emotion is informative and functionally beneficial it is positive if and only if it is transforming the world in a constructive way?

This leads me to the third point, namely the obvious polysemy of negative/positive adjectives¹. That is particularly salient where two or more senses of negative/positive adjectives are linked together. Think about an emotion that is painful but desirable, or the opposite, pleasant but undesirable (e.g. Sundararajan's *pleasure to kill*), or being undesirable but informative, or being informative but harmful (say, hatred). Various such combinations can be envisaged and tested:

negative (-) vs positive (+)	unpleasant vs pleasant	undesirable vs desirable	negative vs positive symptom	negative vs positive consequence	
				internally	externally
emotion ₁	+	-	-	-	-
emotion ₂	+	+	-	-	-
emotion ₃	-	+	-	+	-
emotion _n					

What is of significance in each single case for evaluating an emotion and, then, in all cases treated together for evaluating emotions? What should one think of the fact that an emotion is considered positive on one level yet negative on another? Perhaps one level of evaluation is predominant over other ones. If that is the case, a hierarchy of positiveness and negativeness should be offered. On the face of it, it can be said, for example, that un/pleasantness is subordinate to un/desirability, un/desirability to negativity/positivity of symptom, negativity/positivity of symptom to negativity/positivity of consequence. That means that if an emotion is pleasant but undesirable, the latter prevails, and when it is beneficial even if undesirable, the former prevails and so on. But then, what makes one level of evaluation to predominate over others? And how can we know at all about the value of emotion *qua* emotion and not only of emotion *qua* pleasant or desirable, linked with positive symptom or resulting in positive consequence, either internal or external?

2.

Before I present a suggestion for treating this issue, let me take a look at the past. In a historical perspective I am thinking of three philosophers. I haven't chosen them at random. I hope they undermine, or can undermine, concepts and approaches presented in the ISRE discussion above.

¹ In the ISRE discussion this has been touched upon especially by Remy Debes.

For Plato emotions as such have no particular value. Emotions as emotions are neither good nor bad. He does not say that explicitly in his works. This is corollary to his general view that nothing can be evaluated by itself since all has value in view of knowledge/wisdom (*sophia*) and lack of it (*amathia*)¹. All, emotions included, taken without qualification, is neither good nor evil. So Plato says that there are good (*agatha*) as well as bad (*kakai*) pleasures² and good (*agatha*) as well as base (*aischra*) fears³. More generally, given that affectivity is heterogeneous, an evaluation of emotions *en bloc* is impossible. Their value and functioning depend on their respective position within the structure of the human being. Plato often considers affectivity and particular emotions according to their specific essences and parts of the soul they belong to⁴. However, in the *Philebus*, a late dialogue, Plato claims that:

*but first the eternal nature has chosen measure, moderation, fitness, and all which is to be considered similar to these*⁵.

With that one realizes how much Plato anticipated Aristotle by making measure the first principle, as Plato's principle undoubtedly does apply to affectivity too. As a matter of fact, Aristotle said:

*[...] for instance, we have a bad disposition in regard to anger if we are disposed to get angry too violently or not violently enough, a good disposition if we habitually feel a moderate amount of anger; and similarly in respect of the other emotions. [...] for this is concerned with emotions and actions, in which one can have excess or deficiency or a due mean. For example, one can be frightened or bold, feel desire or anger or pity, and experience pleasure and pain in general, either too much or too little, and in both cases wrongly; whereas to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner, is to feel the best amount of them, which is the mean amount [...]*⁶.

Aristotle, in turn, anticipated – as it turns out, perhaps surprisingly – Descartes who himself did not refer to Aristotle in any way in his treatise on emotions⁷.

¹ See Plato, *Euthydemus* 281e: *Is it not precisely that, of all the other things, not one is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad?*, transl. W. R. M. Lamb.

² See Plato, *Gorgias* 495a, transl. W. R. M. Lamb: *distinction between the good and bad sorts of pleasure*.

³ See Plato, *Protagoras* 360b, transl. W. R. M. Lamb.

⁴ See R. Zaborowski, *Some remarks on Plato on emotions ...*, p. 151.

⁵ Transl. H. N. Fowler. Plato, *Philebus* 66a: *ἀλλὰ πρῶτον μὲν πῆ περι μέτρον καὶ τὸ μέτριον καὶ καίριον καὶ πάντα ὅποσα χρὴ τοιαῦτα νομίζειν, τὴν ταῖδιον ἡρῆσθαι*.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105b–1106b, H. Rackham's transl. [emphasis mine]. See also Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1221a.

⁷ He rather did the opposite saying that all ancient theories of emotions are wrong (see below).

But, isn't that what one should think reading the following conclusion from Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*:

*And now we know them all [i.e. passions], we have less reason to fear them than we had before. For we see that naturally they are all good, and that we ought to avoid only the ill use of them, or their excesses [...]?*¹

Descartes puts it plainly, here too, that the value of emotions is a function of their use and degree. Yet that is a kind of second-level value, since *elles sont toutes bonnes de leur nature*.

To sum up, Plato in his early and middle dialogues makes value of an emotion dependent on its relation with wisdom/ignorance and/or the relation with the part of the soul involved in the emotion. In his late dialogue/s he links value of an emotion to the right measure. It looks as if in his late dialogues Plato evaluated emotion no longer by its relation to wisdom/ignorance but, instead, by its association with measure, or moderation. Aristotle suggested one should avoid *too many* and *too little* and focus on the middle in several respects such as the right time, right occasion, right object, right purpose, and right manner. To Descartes, emotions are all, by their nature, good – a position largely close to the strong positive thesis (such as Buck's and Mun's) or, given that ill use or excesses of emotions do occur, to the weak positive thesis (such as Scheff's, to the extent that his qualification added weakens the strong thesis). We should say that by their nature emotions are always positive but by their use they *can* be negative. But, if they *can* be badly used, where do ill use or/and excess come from? Is a case of ill use or/and excess not part of their nature, which, as such, makes it possible for them to be used badly or/and in excess²? If not, we should probably admit that use of emotion is predominant over its nature, or say that there are prior and secondary characteristics. The nature of emotion is its prior characteristic, while its use is a secondary one. We should then agree that the latter can modify the former.

The difference between Plato, on the one hand, and Aristotle and Descartes, on the other, is that for Plato emotions as such are neither good nor bad, while for Aristotle and Descartes they are either good or bad (or, to be closer to the theme of this paper, positive or negative). Furthermore, Plato's approach is more general since he does not focus particularly on emotions. Emotions are just a part of his broader analysis, whereas Aristotle and Descartes point out to emotions especially and explicitly.

Yet, the difference between Aristotle and Descartes is that to Aristotle emotions have no value as such, i.e. by their nature, and only the way they occur conveys them their value, while to Descartes they are good by nature but can be perverted by their use. Next, to Aristotle emotions are good when experienced in the right circumstances and bad while occurring in excess or

¹ R. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, art. ccxi, transl. anon. with minor corrections by P. Easton [emphasis mine].

² The Stoics would probably answer in the affirmative and because of this they considered emotions as negative.

deficiency, while Descartes does not mention lack (or insufficiency). He speaks just about *mauvais usage ou leurs exces*, while in Aristotle excess is as bad as lack (e.g. *too violently or not violently enough*). In both (or in all three, if we consider the late Plato) right measure is important, but Aristotle is more accurate by specifying more conditions of rightness (up to 5, i.e. time, occasion, object, purpose, and manner) than Descartes who limits himself to two (ill use and excess), unless he envisages his two factors broadly enough to comprise Aristotle's all five.

Viewed from any of the positions supported in the ISRE discussion, Plato, Aristotle and Descartes are seen to represent a positive thesis (p), either in its weak (p2 – rather p2a than p2b or n2) or, possibly – in the case of Descartes – in its strong version (p1). As none of them supported either version of the negative thesis, therefore, [t]he very common notion of “negative emotions” has its origin neither in Plato, nor in Aristotle, nor in Descartes. But if it does not come from them, where does evaluation of emotions as negative stem from? The reply is not difficult. As far as we know, the Stoics were the first to speak largely about affectivity in negative terms¹. They were, at any rate, supportive of a negative view of emotions as they frequently used the term *apatheia*. The term implies a radical eradication of emotions.

Now please observe, which has not been, it seems to me, underscored enough so far², that although the Stoics eliminated emotions through one door, they reintroduced some of them by another. They used to speak about negative *pathe*, which, as such, should be eradicated, but then they did mention positive *eupatheiai*³. Unless we want to ascribe to them a strong negative thesis, we must, I believe, take their interpretation to be a verbal and conceptual mistake, one they could have avoided had they described all affective phenomena by the class term *pathe*, divided into two subclasses: negative *kakopatheiai* and positive *eupatheiai*⁴. But such taxonomy would have weakened their radicalism⁵.

¹ See Diogenes Laertius VII, 110: ἔστι δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος κατὰ Ζήνωννα ἢ ἄλογος καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ψυχῆς κίνησις ἢ ὄρμη πλεονάζουσα. (*Passion, or emotion, is defined by Zeno as an irrational and unnatural movement in the soul, or again as impulse in excess.*, transl. R. D. Hicks) & VII, 111: δοκεῖ δ' αὐτοῖς τὰ πάθη κρίσεις εἶναι, καθὰ φησι Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ Περὶ παθῶν (*They hold the emotions to be judgements, as is stated by Chrysippus in his treatise On the Passions*, transl. R. D. Hicks). Literally, they say *irrational, unnatural, not negative*. They judge emotions negatively also in terms of being *excessive ... exceeding the measures ... unbridled and disobedient ... perturbation ...*. See Chrisippus, frg. 377: <πάθος δὲ πλεονάζουσα ὄρμη> ἢ ὑπερτείνουσα τὰ κατὰ τὸν λόγον μέτρα· ἢ <ὄρμη ἐκφερομένη καὶ ἀπειθῆς λόγῳ>. Παρὰ φύσιν οὖν κινήσεις ψυχῆς κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν λόγον ἀπειθειαν τὰ πάθη. (*Passion is an excessive appetite exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the reason. Passions, then, are a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason.*, transl. W. Wilson modified).

² The rare author who did that is M. Spanneut. He points out the unexplainable presence of the illogical with the *logos*. See M. Spanneut, *Permanence du Stoïcisme ...*, p. 40 & M. Spanneut, *Apatheia ancienne, apatheia chrétienne ...*, pp. 4656–4717.

³ See R. Zaborowski, *Is the Control of Emotion Possible?*, p. 36.

⁴ See R. Zaborowski, *Some remarks on Plato on emotions*, pp. 146–147.

⁵ Hence, we should credit the Stoics with either no conceptual mistake but then a strong negative thesis or a weak negative thesis but then a conceptual mistake.

I take it has now been shown to what extent the Stoics' viewpoint differs from Plato's and Aristotle's. They differ from each other no less than *apatheia* and *metriopatheia* views do. This is why we can understand better the first sentence of the *Passions of the Soul* by Descartes which runs as follows:

*There is nothing more clearly evinces the learning
which we receive from the Ancients to be defective,
than what they have written concerning the passions.*¹

In fact, if we believe Descartes to be fair, we should think that he must have referred neither to Plato nor Aristotle (which makes his general label *the Ancients* too exaggerated). He limited himself to the Stoics², especially to Seneca, as it can be inferred from his letter to the Princess Elisabeth³.

After the Stoics this kind of evaluating emotions as negative was supported by early Christian philosophers, notwithstanding some nuances between Latin and Greek thinkers⁴. The moment the Aristotelian, *metriopatheian*, view was rejected (or replaced? but why and how? – this question is for historians of ideas to answer), the Stoic-like taxonomy become dominant: instead of speaking of *pathe* divided into *eu-* and *kako-*, the common way of conceptualizing had become: *pathe* (bad) vs *eupatheiai* (good). This conceptual mistake may be at the point of origin of the subsequent confusion and ideology of negative emotions.

3.

From what has been said it follows that there is a long tradition of classifying emotions as negative indeed. I agree with Buck that this is one of the major errors in this field, though, in order to remedy it, I wouldn't like to classify them as positive as that would be erroneous too⁵. Given the variety and intricacy of affectivity a unique *en bloc* label is a simplification. Since emotions are different and heterogeneous in kind, I suggest a different model to grasp their richness.

Before I do that let me point out certain distinctions as to what it actually means for an emotion to be termed negative (or positive) in everyday talk, ordinary as well as academic, failing which the whole discussion is obscured. First, the issue of evaluating emotions is confused by mistaking actual for faked emotion⁶. There are several cases of substitution of an emotion for what is not an emotion or not that emotion. Think about an adolescent love where the loved one is confused with his or her parent and, by projection, is

¹ This is the very beginning of his treatise *The Passions of the Soul* = art. i, transl. anon. with minor corrections by P. Easton.

² The Stoic approach is effective when taken as a therapeutic step, e.g. interpreted as a kind of rationalization. See R. Zaborowski, *Is the Control of Emotion Possible?*, esp. n. 13, p. 44.

³ See *Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth*, transl. J. F. Bennett.

⁴ See R. Zaborowski, *Clément d'Alexandrie et Origène sur les émotions ...*.

⁵ They are *all* positive because they are informative (see Buck) or for another reason (see Mun), but this is too general a claim, for, in several cases, their being informative is lessened by another feature.

⁶ I should say *faking an emotion* rather than *a faked emotion* because a faked emotion is not an emotion.

attributed features the loved probably does not share. Or look at a case of a deliberately faked emotion, or of mistaking a symptom of an emotion for the emotion itself. In such cases, characteristics of what is essentially superficial and/or artificial or secondary/complementary tend to be ascribed to what does not have such characteristics. In a word, an emotion when confused with what only appears to be, but is not really, an emotion is credited with features of what is not constitutive for an emotion to be one (or alternatively that particular emotion). A person who tends to classify emotions as negative often relies on similar cases and it is not surprising that emotions appear then as negative. But, in such cases, negativity of emotions is nothing but a result of confusing an emotion with what is not an emotion at all or with what is an emotion but not the one considered.

Another kind of error results from cases, not infrequent ones, of a person being incapable of naming correctly his own emotion, either by misnaming it or not naming it at all. Here, incapacity of identifying an emotion by the experiencing subject is regarded as a feature of an emotion. But is it reasonable to infer from, say, one's incapacity to explain (or explain correctly) his erroneous thinking, anything about the error itself?

A second kind of distinction must be made in respect of the manner emotions are evaluated. To me, emotions are commonly evaluated in a generalized manner. This occurs when emotions are evaluated on account of the object of emotion, i.e. on account of how emotion itself evaluates its object (or, to put it differently, how an object is evaluated in an emotion¹). If the object is negative, emotion is evaluated as negative², and if the object is positive, the emotion is evaluated as positive. A more nuanced approach distinguishes here between emotion-*towards* (of pursuit) and emotion-*from*³ (of avoidance)⁴. Accordingly, if the object of an emotion-*towards* is positive, emotion itself is positive, if negative – negative; and if the object of an emotion-*from* is positive, emotion itself is negative, if negative – positive. The value of an object of emotion is mostly understood in terms of pleasantness (vs unpleasantness) or benefit (vs harmfulness) for the subject of the emotion. I call this way of evaluating emotion pragmatic evaluation (compare dli above). However, when an emotion is evaluated on account of

¹ Say, an object *O* in a desire is evaluated as positive, while the same object *O* in hatred is evaluated as negative. It does not follow that we can infer from that the desire is positive or that hatred is negative. It is crucial, therefore, to distinguish between valuation occurring in an emotion and valuation of that emotion.

² I am not saying: *is always evaluated as*, but: *there is a widespread tendency to consider it as such*.

³ A distinction of movements into *movement-from* and *movement-to* as regards emotions can be found in: Chrysippus frg. 377: <Ορμη> μὲν οὖν φορὰ διανοίας ἐπὶ τι ἢ ἀπὸ του· (*Appetite is then the movement of the mind to or from something.*, transl. W. Wilson modified). He goes on to say that *passion is an excessive appetite* (see above).

⁴ As far as we know, the oldest explicit distinction of that kind (i.e. pursuit vs avoidance) was settled by Diotimus who claimed that *feeling are [criteria] of choice and avoidance: for what is related with us is to be chosen and what is alienated from us is to be avoided* (DK 68 A 111 = DK 76, 3: [...] αἰρέσεως δὲ καὶ φυγῆς τὰ πάθη τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὡς προσοικειούμεθα, τοῦτο αἰρετόν ἐστιν, τὸ δὲ ὡς προσαλλοτριούμεθα, τοῦτο φευκτόν ἐστιν.). See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 493: [...] *if the obscure Diotimus is to be trusted here, we should let them [i.e. feelings] be our guide in what is to be sought and what avoided [...]*.

its degree of benefit or harmfulness for society (compare d1ii above)¹, it is more adequately described as social evaluation. For instance, since anger is generally taken to be negative, anger as such and any occurrence of anger are considered to be negative.

Another generalized way of evaluating an emotion is to evaluate it because of the value ascribed to the group² that particular emotion belongs to. If a group of emotions is, in its majority, evaluated as positive/negative, then every emotion of that group is, in common view, evaluated as positive/negative. Fear is a case in point. Since fear (or several kinds of fear, e.g. dread, anxiety, panic) is generally evaluated as negative, the same stands for any kind of fear, e.g. fear *for* someone, or existential fear. I call this manner of evaluating statistical evaluation³. One reason behind statistical evaluation – or for treating emotions in that way at all – is, in my view, the ambiguity of affective vocabulary⁴. For example, *joy* is used both when speaking of a whole group of emotions sharing the same affective modus and of a specific emotion of that group. As it is, the same word (*joy*, *love*, *fear*) is used in one case as a generic term, and as a species-specific term in another, which results in ambiguity and confusion regarding the value of emotions of the same group⁵.

To be accurate, the way of evaluating emotions should rely on the actual value of the emotion itself, which in turn presumes a careful examination of that particular emotion at class-, genus-, species- and individual episode levels, as well as the place the emotion has within the whole realm of affectivity. I see two ways of approaching emotions, their value included. A first option is to refer to the content, occurrence, conditions and circumstances of an emotional episode. An emotional episode is considered in isolation, if that is at all feasible, and evaluated as such. In this approach, there are several factors and elements to consider and, as we see in the ISRE discussion, an episode can be positive for one reason (e.g. because it is pleasant) but negative for another (e.g. because its consequence is harmful). We can also imagine an emotional episode which, while positive for one reason (say, because its consequence is beneficial) is nevertheless branded negative for another (say, when linked to a negative symptom⁶). To establish some order there is an obvious need of hierarchy of positiveness and negativeness. Yet, someone

¹ See e.g. B. Bastian, P. Kuppens, K. De Roover & E. Diener, *Is valuing positive emotion associated with life satisfaction?*, where [t]he experience of positive emotion is closely linked to subjective well-being [abstract has been first published on Apr 21, 2014, with no pagination specified].

² By a group of emotions I understand here several emotions sharing the same modus, e.g. pleasure, happiness, bliss, joy, cheerfulness etc.

³ If both ways of evaluating are merged, then evaluating emotions gets even more muddled.

⁴ Ambiguity as well as lack of sufficient distinctions. The remark by L. Wittgenstein – *Philosophical Investigations*, §132, [...] *we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it look as if we saw it as our task to reform language* – is of the highest importance here.

⁵ Another kind of confusion is fear *of* vs fear *for*. The latter has more in common with, or is of the same modus as care (while fear-*of* is of ekklitic (see below), fear-*for* is of klitic type).

⁶ See for instance Mun's *some emotions can be said to be "negative" in terms of being necessarily or characteristically associated with a negative valence or phenomenological quality*.

subscribing to scepticism may object on the argument that a chain of consequences is such that we cannot be sure to discern all and any consequences of an emotional event, which involves a risk of a *regressus ad infinitum*¹, and makes it practically impossible to determine the value of an emotion.

Another option is to try to build a more formal model². A detailed elaboration of such a model cannot be put forward in this paper. It may be the result of a dissection of affectivity in both its horizontal (affective modi) and vertical (affective levels) perspectives³. First, in order to avoid the tendency to divide affectivity into positive and negative emotions I suggest to draw on von Monakow & Mourgue's division of affectivity into *klisis* and *ekklisis*⁴. This pertains to the horizontal divide of all emotions into two kinds: emotions–*towards* (of pursuit) and emotions–*from* (of avoidance)⁵. This means that any emotion is either *klitic* or *ekklitic*⁶. This formal distinction is useful as it implies no a priori evaluation of emotions. This is the most general horizontal distinction of all emotions followed by distinctions of *klitic* and *ekklitic* kinds of emotions in groups of emotions each corresponding to a specific modus of affectivity (all emotions of the same affective modus form one group). Since the distinction is into groups of *klitic* and *ekklitic* emotions, then into groups of emotions according to their modi, they say nothing about any a priori value of emotions.

Second, several emotions in the same group are not homogeneous totally. They share the same modus but for the rest they differ. This sort of difference

¹ How far should one progress? Although expressed in a different context, a remark by M. Evans, *A Partisan's Guide to Socratic Intellectualism*, p. 22 that *each of us has an infinite number of beliefs, most of which are so complex that no mortal creature could ever succeed in expressing them* seems valid here too. I am inclined to say: a chain of consequences stemming from an emotion may be so long that it is hard to give a full account of it.

² In case of the formal model, however, the question in each case will be: how to determine the level a particular emotional episode belongs to?

³ To be sincere, I must say I am not ready with that at this moment. This is what I have been working for the past two decades. For the time being, I have no satisfactory result I could submit for a public discussion.

⁴ To some extent, *klisis* and *ekklisis* correspond to *positive* and *negative* valence. However, this is exactly what I suggest to avoid – negative as well as positive label in any sense whatever, because in the next step *positiveness* and *negativeness* of valence is transferred to the value of an emotion itself (see Mun above). See C. von Monakow & R. Mourgue, *Introduction à l'étude de la neurologie ...*, p. 8: [...] *C'est pourquoi des expressions tirées du grec comme klisis [note: De klisis, action de s'incliner vers.] (pour désigner la tendance finaliste et créatrice dans le sens de l'union vers un être ou une chose) et ekklisis [note: De ekklisis, action d'éviter.] (pour désigner le phénomène contraire) paraissent beaucoup plus maniables sans inconvénients que les expressions tirées du langage de la vie de tous les jours, qui se rapportent, toujours et nécessairement, à un stade très évolué du développement.* Note that *ekklisis* was used in relation to affectivity as early as by the Stoics, see Diogenes Laertius VII, 116, 1–3: Εἶναι δὲ καὶ εὐπαθείας φασὶ τρεῖς, χαρὰν, εὐλάβειαν, βούλησιν. [...] καὶ τὴν μὲν χαρὰν ἐναντίαν [φασίν] εἶναι τῆ ἡδονῆ, οὖσαν εὐλογον ἐπαρσιν: τὴν δ' εὐλάβειαν [ἐναντίαν [φασίν] εἶναι] τῷ φόβῳ, οὖσαν εὐλογον ἔκκλισιν. φοβηθῆσεσθαι μὲν γὰρ τὸν σοφὸν οὐδαμῶς, εὐλαβηθῆσεσθαι δέ. (Also they say that there are three emotional states which are good, namely, joy, caution, and wishing. [...] caution, the counterpart of fear, rational avoidance; for though the wise man will never feel fear, he will yet use caution., transl. R. D. Hicks.) [emphasis mine]

⁵ This is why we often regard emotions in pairs, e.g. joy and sorrow, desire and fear, madness and depression, worry and anger, courage and shame, love (friendship) and hatred (hostility) etc. The exceptional case of surprise cannot be discussed here.

⁶ Since there can be no neutral emotion, here lies a first difference between emotion and thought. Thought not only is neutral but it is expected to be so – it is supposed to preserve an indifference towards its object.

is explained by dint of vertical distinction, i.e. levels of affectivity generally, and levels of the same modus in the case of each group of emotions. The idea is Platonic and Schelerian, though Plato is not as much explicit about it as is Scheler¹. On this view, the higher the level, the greater the relevance of an emotion for its value². For example, an emotion of the lower level of the soul/personality, if negative, is less negative than an emotion of the higher level of the soul/personality; and an emotion of the higher level of the soul/personality, if positive, is more positive than an emotion of the lower level of the soul/personality. For instance, a love is more positive, i.e. its relevance for values is greater, than a (mere) liking, hatred is (much) more negative than a (mere) dislike, happiness is more positive than pleasure, and so on. This is the hierarchy within the affective world taken at face value. Another element should be taken into account too. It is formal as well, and in this I again follow Plato and Scheler. As a matter of fact, the value an object of emotion plays in evaluating the emotion must be taken into account. That means, for example, that hatred of the evil is not of the same value as hatred of the good³; and the same works for other modi of affectivity⁴.

The vertical approach helps one to address dilemmas of several levels of positiveness and negativeness. For example, the order of un/pleasantness, un/desirability, association with something negative or positive, symptoms or valence and with consequence either external/internal or harmful/beneficial, would be better confronted with what is called negative/positive in respect of emotions⁵. Only by referring to the place each particular emotion has in the hierarchy of affectivity and to its essence can its value be captured appropriately. To this end, I suggest, it is useful to merge the horizontal and vertical perspectives into one framework. In the end, that will provide us with a full map of affectivity⁶, which, in turn, will allow us to evaluate affectivity.

¹ See R. Zaborowski, *Max Scheler's model of stratified affectivity ...*. A relevant passage from M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics ...*, p. 332 runs as follows: *four well-delineated levels of feeling*. As for Plato, see R. Zaborowski, *Some remarks on Plato on emotions* & R. Zaborowski, *Some Neglected Details in Plato's Chariot Allegory*. A hierarchical approach worked out in a more general way, i.e. applicable to the whole of reality, was presented by N. Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*.

² Neither *high* nor *low* has a meaning of appreciation or depreciation. This is only to indicate an emotion's place in the hierarchy of affectivity. For high/low distinction without appreciation/depreciation see Nicolai Hartmann's concept of equal reality of all levels of reality.

³ Broadly speaking from what Plato says in *Laws*, 653b–c, we can infer that love of a good is good, love of an evil is evil, hatred of a good is evil, hatred of an evil is good.

⁴ Consider, for instance, fear *of* (or *for*) what is negative and fear *of* (or *for*) what is positive.

⁵ See Debes' *denial of negative emotions without a definition of "negative."*

⁶ See R. Zaborowski, *Feeling or Thought ...*. When horizontal and vertical perspectives combined, we obtain:

from/to	ekklitic			klitic		
modi	of sorrow	of fear	...	of love	of joy	...
4 th level	despair	anguish	...	friendship	bliss	...
3 th level	unhappiness	dread	...	love	happiness	...
2 nd level	sadness	fear	...	liking	joy	...
1 st level	unpleasantness	concern	...	sympathy	pleasure	...

The aim of this paper is to show that disagreements about the value of affectivity stem from the intricacy of the affective world. Having referred to a recent debate and a discussion of points crucial to how emotions are evaluated, then to certain past positions, I have suggested a deferral of evaluation of emotions until a model capturing the whole of affectivity has been worked out. I could not develop such model in my paper and, therefore, the last part of the paper is understood to offer a possible solution for balancing certain difficulties that emerge in evaluating emotions. Such difficulties tend to result from a one-level model of affectivity, so I suggest affectivity should be reconsidered in terms of horizontal as well as vertical structures. In this sense there is no dichotomy of positive vs negative emotions, the only dichotomy being of klitic vs ekklitic emotions. These two kinds of emotions include several modi of emotions.

On the other hand, more and less basic emotions do exist. But none of them means positive or negative. Each level is equally important for the whole structure of affectivity. Conceived as class, group, genus, species, or sub-species, they all have a different place/position and function in the ontology of affectivity. But neither class nor genus nor species as such is positive or negative. To leave aside a formal model we should go for the first option, that is, for evaluating a particular occurrence of an emotion, which requires information concerning the content, conditions and circumstances thereof.

It is legitimate to speak about negative and positive emotions without qualification, yet that is overly general and leads to disagreements as manifest in the ISRE discussion. Of course, we can always say that affectivity is positive¹, but taken *simpliciter*, such a claim is too general and ends up in a sterile prejudice². Then, we meet qualifications at this level, for example we are told that affectivity is positive as long as it is informative³, provided that being informative is itself positive (the latter is not explicit, meaning it is taken for granted).

In assuming a vertical, hierarchical model it is important to avoid putting forward dichotomies too. In this sense there is no dichotomy of, say, bodily vs mental emotions⁴. If the whole of affectivity is structured in more than a two-fold perspective, one is less tempted to apply one-to-one evaluation and to consider either mental emotions as positive and bodily emotions as negative or the other way around⁵.

¹ See Buck's *no negative emotions. Emotions are informative, and sometimes they inform us of negative events* and Mun's *all emotions are functionally beneficial in some form or another*.

² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b, H. Rackham's transl., criticism of speaking about *apatheia* absolutely and without qualification: [...] *though they make a mistake in using these terms absolutely, without adding 'in the right (or wrong) manner' and 'at the right (or wrong) time' and the other qualifications*.

³ Here lies a second difference with thinking – not all thinking is informative.

⁴ E.g. *pleasure of senses vs contentment of the mind* (in: Descartes' *Letter to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia*, written on Aug. 18, 1645, transl. J. F. Bennett).

⁵ The same works for other dichotomic axes, such as long-term vs short-term, passive vs active, aesthetic vs moral, egocentric vs altruistic, reactive vs spontaneous, determined vs autonomous, destructive vs creative,

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blind vs intuitive, biologically inherited vs culturally acquired. See also a discussion as to whether emotions are rational (e.g. B. W. Helm, *Emotions and Motivation: Reconsidering Neo-Jamesian Accounts*, pp. 304–305: *emotions [...] are rational responses*) or not (see J. Elster, *Emotional Choice and Rational Choice*, p. 264: *emotions [...] cannot be rational*). In my view such dichotomies lead to aporias: using one label for the whole domain of affectivity is too general. In debates structured in this way each of the parties is right but only partly (and, accordingly, it is also wrong – partly).

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