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## Cognitivism, Feelings, and the Background Structures of Emotion

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# Cognitivism, Feelings, and the Background Structures of Emotion

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Practical Philosophy and Applied Ethics

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to call attention to some of the shortcomings of a cognitivist theory's incorporation of feeling into a philosophy of emotion. There has been a tendency within the cognitivist theories to assume as irreducible the intentional structures through which these theories operate. A consequence of this tendency often sees feelings compartmentalized through internal and external distinctions, such as bodily feelings and world-directed feelings. What appears to be ignored is the notion that prior to all emotional experience we have already found ourselves belonging to a world, and attempts at a phenomenological understanding of a category of feeling as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world prior to experience become obscured or dismissed. I argue for developing a phenomenological approach in illuminating the background structure of emotion presupposed by a cognitivist view.

## **Introduction**

A traditional understanding of a cognitivist theory of emotion suggests that emotions are reducible to cognitive states, such as judgments. In this context, emotions have evaluative and intentional content. There has been a tendency within the cognitivist theories of emotion to assume as irreducible the intentional structures through which these theories operate. A consequence of this tendency often sees feeling as a residual component of the intentional structures of emotional experience and compartmentalized through internal and external distinctions, such as bodily feelings and world-directed feelings. The aim of this thesis is to call attention to some of the shortcomings of a cognitivist theory's incorporation of feeling into a philosophy of emotion. I focus specifically on one category of feeling, a background sense of belonging to a world. What often appears to be ignored is the notion that prior to all emotional experience we have already found ourselves belonging to a world, and attempts at a phenomenological understanding of feeling as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world prior to an emotional experience become obscured or dismissed.

The cognitivist accounts I present in this thesis proffer two contrasting views of how to incorporate feeling into emotional experience. On one hand, emotions are judgments that take objects through intentional states while, on the other hand, emotions contain feelings that appear to be the most intimate part of our emotions and permeate all of emotional experience. A problem arises regarding how emotions can be cognitive states while at the same time recognizing feeling as a central component. In this case, the underlying concern of each

cognitivist view I present here regards how to unite the cognitive component with the feeling component of emotional experience.

In each cognitivist theory's attempt to accommodate feeling into the intentionality of emotion, I show how a bifurcated view of emotions through cognitive and affective components obscures a phenomenological perspective that demonstrates feeling as permeable throughout the intentional structures of emotion. I argue that each cognitivist view fails respectively to recognize a category of feeling that lies as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world and is responsible for shaping and motivating much of the content of our emotional experience. I conclude by arguing for a phenomenological approach in illuminating the background structure of emotion, and I propose "existential feelings" as a basis from which to examine further this neglected category of feeling.

In the first section I introduce Robert C. Solomon's theory that emotions constitute a framework of evaluative judgments that structure our way of experiencing the world in significant and meaningful ways. At the heart of Solomon's philosophy lies what he calls "rational romanticism," the idea that emotions are far more sophisticated than being simply about feelings. For Solomon an emotion is not a feeling in response to a situation but rather an interpretation, an evaluative judgment. At times we may not even be consciously aware that a judgment has been made. As emotions consist only of evaluative judgments, feelings are reduced to the inconsequential role of being a product of physiological responses to these evaluative judgments, such as the release of adrenaline. Thus Solomon forces a division between emotions and feelings by limiting the affective component of emotion to bodily feelings. It is evaluative judgments and how they constitute the ways we experience our world that embodies the "passion" we typically associate with our emotions. These evaluative judgments are always

about something, meaning emotions always take objects through intentional states. However, the way emotions hold objects within evaluative judgments is open to a degree of reflection in that one may accept or dismiss a judgment once it becomes consciously discernable. By the fact these judgments are susceptible to a degree of reflection there is an acquiescence of responsibility for our emotions. I argue, first, that if emotions as evaluative judgments contain within them the sole source of meaning and significance of our experienced world, then by limiting feelings to bodily feelings it seems Solomon is to unable account for the background context out of which these emotions arise. The world that is the background to all our emotional experiences becomes taken for granted. Second, I argue that it remains unclear whether or not I can be responsible for this background world as an object of emotion.

The first section sees the role of feeling in Solomon's theory limited to bodily feelings. The second section concerns Peter Goldie's accommodation of feelings by providing for an externally-directed component of feeling alongside bodily feelings in what Goldie calls "feeling towards." Goldie states that much of philosophy is guilty of over-intellectualizing emotions in such a way that much of the focus targets the intentionality of emotional experience while the feeling component remains neglected. Emotions involve not only the taking of objects through intentional states, but also the perception of objects simultaneously motivates an externally-directed feeling towards these objects in a way that captures both the intentional and affective components of emotional experience. Bodily feelings participate in this experience by "borrowing" from the emotion's world-directed intentionality in a way that makes bodily feelings and feelings towards inextricably intertwined in emotional experience. First, I argue that if both bodily feelings and feeling towards participate in an emotional experience, there remains an experiential ambiguity as to what distinguishes these two components of feelings during an

emotional experience. What is needed is a phenomenology of feeling that makes no use of internal and external distinctions of feeling. Second, it remains unclear what motivates a feeling towards without reference to a background structure. Like Solomon, Goldie's theory appears to take for granted the world that is the background to all our emotional experiences.

The first two sections introduce two cognitivist views that attempt to accommodate the role of feelings within their intentional structures. I argue that each view fails respectively to recognize a category of feeling that lies as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging and relating to a world. In the third section I begin arguing for a phenomenological approach in illuminating the background structure of emotion. Perceptual and cognitive theories of emotion fair well in explicating the processes through which evaluative judgments manifest as emotions. But the process through which emotions take objects through intentional states is already presupposing a sense of what it means for an object to "be" in a world. I use Edmund Husserl's criticism of scientific methodology to identify the perspective through which many cognitive theories formulate an understanding of the world through propositional attitudes. I argue that the world that is the background to our emotional experiences cannot be an object articulated through intentional states, and a background feeling of belonging to a world shapes the possible ways through which objects become experienced through our emotions.

The fourth section focuses on Matthew Ratcliffe's theory of "existential feelings" to illuminate further what shapes and motivates a background structure within the context of a world. The "world" in this context is a modal space of possibilities that Ratcliffe calls our "sense of reality." Possibilities in the world not only appear to us as potentialities but also in ways that are enticing and personal. Existential feelings operate as this pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world that shapes the possible ways objects may appear to us in personal and



meaningful ways. I provide four examples of existential feelings. In the first two I compare and contrast existential feelings of hope and hopelessness. Existential feelings in both examples demonstrate a background feeling that permeates all thought and activity and contributes to a sense of relatedness with the world. For the most part, existential feelings operate indiscernibly as a backdrop to our everyday lives. In the last two examples I use alterations in everyday activities and perturbations of reality through mental illness to provide examples of how existential feelings may be forced to the foreground of experience. I conclude by returning to Solomon and Goldie to highlight some of the challenges faced by a cognitivist view of emotions and how developing a phenomenological approach using existential feelings may allay some of these concerns.

## Chapter I: Solomon, Feeling, and Evaluative Judgments

Regarding the relationship between affectivity and cognition, much of the philosophical and interdisciplinary discussion calls attention to recent developments within the perceptual and cognitive theories of emotion. One such perception-based theory, Stephanie D. Preston and Frans B. M. de Waal's Perception-Action Model (PAM), focuses on a stringently mechanistic and evolutionary account of this relationship. In empathy, for example, the perception of another's affective state generates a process of automatic responses within the prefrontal cortex that then primes the corresponding subclass of perception-act mechanisms to create a representation of the other's affective state in the observer.<sup>1</sup>

However, in a cognitive theory of emotion, this relationship often develops a hybrid of perceptual and cognitive elements through intentional states. Intentionality in this context refers to the idea that all emotions are about something, and that which the emotion is about is called the emotion's object. To say emotions are intentional is to say emotions establish connections between us and the objects that come to make up our world. In *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*, Robert C. Solomon states that the connections that emotions establish constitute a framework of evaluative judgments through which the world is experienced. Emotions are not judgments about preconceived objects but rather these judgments are what shape our experience of objects. For example, one does not first encounter a snake and then determines it to be frightening; rather, it is an evaluative judgment that structures the experience to make the object

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1. Preston and de Waal, "Empathy," 4.

what it is: a frightening snake. As emotions consist only of these evaluative judgments, the role of affectivity is reduced to a residual product of physiological processes within the body. The apparent intensity of an emotion's "feeling" represents only the personal significance of a judgment and constitutes nothing of an emotion's true "essence."<sup>2, 3</sup>

Solomon's and de Waal's theories help further our understanding of the basic structures of affectivity and cognition, particularly in the fields of cognitive neuroscience and psychopathology. However, their application is not without controversy. From certain philosophical perspectives we find in the relevant research a near ubiquitous tendency to assume as irreducible the intentional structures through which these theories operate, and attempts at a phenomenological understanding of feeling as deeply-rooted or permeable throughout an underlying experiential structure become obscured or dismissed. The extent to which these accounts tend to assume or dismiss this phenomenological perspective seems at odds with the intuitive conviction that feelings constitute an integral and inextricable connection with the processes that provide individual meaning and a foundation upon which to experience a personal world. The preliminary analysis begins with Solomon's cognitive theory to explicate this tendency.

The intuitive conviction that feeling plays an integral role in the shaping of personal experience, however, is not entirely lost on Solomon. Emotional experiences are often associated with certain sensations of feelings. One may feel irritable, tense, or flush when one experiences anger, for example. Although such sensations may accompany the experience of anger, it does not follow that these associated sensations of feeling are what constitutes the emotion. An emotion is never simply a feeling. Feelings, Solomon states, "are typically if not always

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2. Solomon, *The Passions*, 97.

3. *Ibid.*, 129.

associated with our emotions,” but feelings are only physiologically linked with emotional experience through bodily feelings.<sup>4</sup> Emotions are always about something, and for this reason emotions always take objects through intentional states.

Fear in the following example may be a particularly visceral emotion for anyone experiencing severe turbulence onboard an aircraft in flight. In this example the emotion of fear appears to manifest itself in the belief that my life is in imminent danger. How would Solomon decipher this experience? While it is tempting to say this emotion is about a concern regarding the structural integrity of the aircraft during a turbulent event, such danger is seldom the case as most aircraft are designed to withstand incredible forces. The emotion is about my belief that my life is in danger. The object of this emotion—the aircraft as a fearful object posing a threat to my safety—represents something subjectively distinct from the emotion’s cause—a turbulent atmospheric event. Turbulence may be the cause that aroused a sensual awareness to my present situation, but nothing about the outside atmospheric conditions or the aircraft’s structural integrity is represented in the belief that constitutes my immediate emotion of fear. Once the plane lands safely or I come to understand that nothing is to be feared since these occurrences are common and perfectly safe, the belief that my life is in danger is no longer tenable, and the emotion is necessarily terminated. For this reason Solomon would say my emotion is a belief-judgment, and the object of my belief-judgment is not to be equated with the cause of my belief-judgment. As for the associated feelings of fear, they are the physiological processes resulting subsequently from this judgment, such as an increased heart rate or the release of adrenaline.

In the example above, the emotion did not constitute a sensation of feelings in response to an experienced discomfort. Instead, the emotion constituted a rational evaluation of my situation as dangerous from which a bodily feeling of fear followed. Feeling, Solomon states, provides

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4. Solomon, *The Passions*, 111.

little relevance in any such discernment. This is because feelings as physiological responses contain no means of intentional or self-conscious assessment; feelings are neither rational nor deliberative. The bodily chemistry and the sensations caused by that chemistry themselves have nothing to do with emotions.<sup>5</sup> Feelings do not have directions that identify what the emotion is about. Emotions are always about something, so to say that “I am fearful” would be an incomplete expression in that it fails to identify what the emotion is about.<sup>6</sup> The experience of anger, for example, may cause a rise in blood pressure, but someone experiencing high blood pressure does not require one to be angry. Furthermore, one may be angry without experiencing anything in particular.<sup>7</sup> If emotions are to contain the meaning and value we typically associate with emotional experience, then we must reject feeling as playing an essential role in emotions. This allows Solomon to conclude that emotions as evaluative judgments, not feelings, provide the meaningful context through which we find ourselves belonging to a unique and personal world.

Solomon’s theory provides a reasoned response to the antiquated understanding of emotions as identified with bodily sensations, such as observed in Descartes’s account of emotions as the movement of the “animal spirits” in the soul.<sup>8</sup> Understanding what motivates these animal spirits to act upon our cognitive faculties poses a serious challenge to any theory that forces a division of body and mind. Solomon’s theory is not a harmonious balance of cognitive and affective faculties but a theory that finds these two faculties synonymous. “Reason,” Solomon states, “is nothing other than perspicacious passion.”<sup>9</sup> Emotions reduced to

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5. Solomon, *The Passions*, 95.

6. Solomon, “Emotions and Choice,” 21-22.

7. Solomon, “The Logic of Emotion,” 44.

8. Descartes, “Passions of the Soul,” 330-334.

9. Solomon, *The Passions*, 59.

their pathological and somatic components provide no means of cognitive discernment in a meaningful and value-laden context. For Solomon, this purely empirical perspective observes the world in a state of matter-of-fact impartiality and proffers no decisive role in motivating a context of personal significance. We do not experience the world as this “lifeless complex of facts.”<sup>10</sup> Emotions are not concerned with the world but with *my* world. A scientific and objective world is incapable of providing the meaningful content of our personal lives. Instead, it is through our emotions that the world is experienced as a subjective and personal world. Emotions constitute the sole source of meaning and value each of us experience subjectively, and by understanding emotions to be evaluative judgments, this subjective world becomes my personal world.

Solomon’s point here is to introduce the conception that our world is not experienced through the perspective of an objective, scientific “reality.” Emotions are subjective, and their objects are not about “facts” from a scientific and impersonal comportment of the world. Emotions are about *our* world. The impersonal rationalization of our world through an objective and scientific perspective, the “myth of the passions” as Solomon describes it, has instilled in us the resilient belief that emotion and reason represent two categorically distinct capacities of the mind; emotions are the capricious, distorting, and subservient counterpart to the faculty of reason. The subjectivity of emotional experience, rather than applying standards of interpretation and evaluation to pre-given objects, supplies these standards through a framework within which these objects are experienced as our personal reality.<sup>11</sup> Every emotion is a unique way of seeing the world. Emotions are not simply judgments about objects in the world but rather “an active

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10. Solomon, *The Passions*, 19.

11. *Ibid.*, 135.

way of structuring our experience, a way of experiencing something.”<sup>12</sup> It is through a system of judgments that emotions frame the experience of our world in a subjective way. The way the world is structured for us through our emotions establishes the framework of values that gives our experience of objects meaning and significance. In the aircraft example, the judgment that maintains an aircraft as an object of fear is tenable only within the confines of subjective experience. The point is not to give primacy to either perspective but to demonstrate how emotions as evaluative judgments establish the cognitive framework through which the objective world becomes experienced subjectively. This hypothesis requires Solomon to formulate this conception through a “two-world” distinction: an objective reality and our subjective “surreality.”<sup>13</sup>

All objects of emotions are in our surreality. This is not to say emotions are simply “mental states” that remain inside our minds. Emotions are always about something, and for this reason the logical nature of Solomon’s cognitive framework makes an emotion a “structure linking ourselves and the objects of our world which provides the structures of our world.”<sup>14</sup> However, using the aircraft example, we may see the object of an emotion suggests two separate perspectives of the same object through Solomon’s two-world distinction. I may believe the object of my emotion immediately concerns a physical object, and the emotion arises as an appropriate response to this physical object in a situational context. But upon closer inspection we see this may not be the case as the aircraft as a physical object proffers nothing fearful in this regard. Instead, the emotion shapes the experience to become an object experienced as dangerous through my surreality. While these two perspectives may refer to the same object, an aircraft in a turbulent event, one represents the cause of the emotion while the other represents the object of

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12. Solomon, “Nothing to be Proud,” 31.

13. Solomon, *The Passions*, 115.

14. *Ibid.*, 119.

the emotion. The cause of the emotion is always an actual event, like a turbulent atmosphere, and is an objective part of reality. The object of the emotion, the aircraft as a fearful object, is always intentional and experienced subjectively as part of my surreality. Furthermore, by demonstrating how an emotion of fear is terminated with the aircraft's safe landing or the understanding that turbulence poses no danger, Solomon's two-world distinction is reinforced, for an objective account of this scenario is not susceptible to this sort of deliberation. The difference between reality and surreality is the difference between objective and subjective. One is not superimposed upon another; rather, one is the cognitive framework through which the other is experienced.

Recognition of Solomon's two-world distinction accommodates subjectivity within his theory of emotion by uncoupling emotions from their physiological ties. He says emotions are not these "blind or irrational forces that victimize us."<sup>15</sup> Objects in reality are not pre-given with meaningful significance. Upon the sensation of turbulence, the experience of fear was not my response to this event but my interpretation of this event. The difference may appear subtle, but if nothing lies pre-given in an objective reality discernable within a subjective context, it follows that an emotion is not a physiological response but an evaluative judgment of my situation. I may not be consciously aware of this judgment in its immediate formulation, yet this judgment is necessarily my own. I may accept, alter, or dismiss this judgment once the emotion becomes consciously discernable. My fellow passengers may assure me my life is in no immediate danger, and the emotion is dismissed. In this case, emotions not only involve personal evaluations of my situation, but by the fact that these evaluations are susceptible to a degree of reflection or intervention, there is an acquiescence of personal responsibility for my emotions. Furthermore, if the emotion were a physiological response embodied in the sensation of fear, then how could we account for the variety of individual reactions upon encountering a turbulent event? Perhaps

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15. Solomon, *The Passions*, 15.



some find the experience exciting, others appear oblivious. A physiologically-based theory proffers no substantive explanation for this discrepancy.

To what degree may I be responsible for an emotional judgment? Solomon states we may mistakenly identify emotion with the involuntary onset of feeling. I may feel strong bodily sensations upon encountering a turbulent event, bringing about an awareness and vigilance of my current circumstances. Nevertheless, I fail to recognize a judgment has already been made. Solomon states that not all emotions are explicit. We make thousands of these judgments each day. This acquiescence of responsibility, instead, lies in Solomon's claim that all emotions *can* become reflective.<sup>16</sup> If emotions were not capable of some degree of personal intervention, then how emotions contribute to a collective framework constitutive of my personal world would appear rather arbitrary and blind to our personal interests and purposes, and this would be counter to his position that emotions "structure the world to our purposes."<sup>17</sup> However, it remains unclear whether or not every emotion is open to the same level of rational reflection and intervention. The aircraft example provided a clear example of an emotion susceptible to rational intervention and therefore an emotion for which I was personally responsible. But emotions like these are specific occurrences. Solomon says the self is at the heart of every emotion, but in every judgment I have already found myself with a sense of belonging to a world in which something like fear is already a possibility. Emotions develop within a context of significance because I have already deemed certain things to be significant and meaningful. While the emotion of fear may be a specific occurrence that is personally meaningful, it is within a background context of already being in and belonging to a world where such possibilities exist and out of which such occurrences find a source of meaningfulness.

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16. Solomon, *The Passions*, 131.

17. *Ibid.*, xvii.

The onus of Solomon's theory rests upon his capacity to maintain that emotions as a collective framework of evaluative judgments within our surreality provide the sole source of meaning and significance of our experienced world. A scientific and empirical world reveals nothing of objects in a personal and practical context. In doing away with feeling, we face a question regarding how evaluative judgments arise within a context of meaning and value out of an objective world bereft of such meaning. For Solomon, this context lies exclusively within our surreality's collective framework of evaluative judgments. I may assume a degree of responsibility for the ways in which evaluative judgments develop their objects within my surreality, but it remains unclear whether or not I may assume any degree of responsibility for the background context that is already inhabited when a judgment is made. I have already found myself inhabiting a world when an emotion is made. Thus it remains unclear because the world does not appear to be an object for which I may assume responsibility. Perhaps by tracing back to prior experiences interpreted as valuable and significant? For if the experience of an object is to be encountered as significant, this must only point to something already deemed significant.

A distinction between "emotion" and "mood" may proffer this missing foundation, for if emotions represent specific occurrences of meaning, it may be the case that moods incorporate this background world out of which emotions occur. Yet Solomon's definition of mood renders us no closer to an explanation: "Moods are generalized emotions: An emotion focuses its attention on more-or-less particular objects and situations, whereas a mood enlarges its grasp to attend to the world as a whole..."<sup>18</sup> For Solomon the difference between an emotion and a mood is what they are about. Emotions are about specific occurrences while moods take the world as their object. For Solomon, moods are nothing more than generalized emotions. This simply restates the same explanation in broader terms; this does not solve the problem. If moods are

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18. Solomon, *The Passions*, 71.

about the world, then what accounts for the phenomenal and value-laden context out of which moods arise? The pre-given world is already inhabited prior to emotional experience. The pre-given world in this sense does not seem to be an object towards which I can assume responsibility, nor does it seem possible to assume responsibility for a background sense of belonging to a world that is an ever-present context out of which judgments are made. A sense of belonging to a world is already assumed when an evaluative judgment is made and pointing to larger and larger generalized objects of emotions would not accommodate this feeling. As it seems to me, the theory breaks down in ad infinitum justification.

I believe the resulting ambiguity poses an insurmountable challenge to Solomon's two-world distinction. In doing away with feeling, it does not appear that positing a two-world distinction is able to explicate how evaluative judgments arise within a context of meaning without accounting for a background sense of belonging to a world that we already inhabit when a judgment is made. What Solomon means by "feelings" are limited to physiological responses to evaluative judgments, and we have demonstrated that without an object, these types of bodily feelings do little in telling us what emotions are about. This is why feeling plays an insignificant role in Solomon's theory. But at every moment we are beings that find ourselves already belonging to a world, a background feeling presupposed by the intelligibility of propositional subject-object relationships. If within the world a specific object is to be encountered as something to be feared, it is because a background feeling of belonging to a world allows us to relate to objects in a way that is fearful. It appears Solomon's theory accommodates specific occurrences of emotion, but without incorporating feeling it remains unclear how a framework of evaluative judgments can accommodate the background context of the pre-given world out of which they arise. Using Solomon's interpretation of mood as taking the world as a generalized

object to account for the background feeling in which we find ourselves belonging to a world is a conclusion simply too great with the premises he provides.

In the subsequent section I continue the task of introducing the need for a phenomenological analysis of feeling as deeply-rooted and permeable throughout an underlying experiential structure. Some parts of emotional experience involve feelings that are feelings of the body while other parts involve feelings that are not, and there is a need to distinguish between these two types of feeling in Solomon's theory: feelings of the body and feelings directed toward the world. Presently, what is needed is a theory of emotion that incorporates these two types of feeling within emotional experience. One view that maintains the conviction that these two types of feeling constitute an integral and inextricable connection with what emotion reveals about our world is held by Peter Goldie. Solomon's and Goldie's theories are similar in that both maintain emotions are intentional states, with the addition that Goldie finds that feelings also participate in the intentionality of emotion. The primary difference lies in the role Goldie provides feelings in emotional experience and his attempt to distinguish between bodily feelings and what he calls "feeling towards," which are feelings directed towards objects outside the body.

## Chapter II: Goldie, Bodily Feelings, and Feeling Towards

The preceding section challenged Solomon's theory that feelings are both limited to a physiological role within the body and play an inconsequential role in emotions. A bodily feeling alone cannot tell us what an emotion is about; thus, the true essence of an emotion lies in the evaluative judgment. Solomon's theory implicitly recognized that when an evaluative judgment is made we already find ourselves with a background feeling of belonging to a world that lies pre-given before such judgments are possible. However, what Solomon's theory failed to recognize is the inextricable connection this background feeling plays in providing a source of meaning from which judgments are sourced, and even by accommodating larger and larger objects of emotion, it remained unclear how a judgment incorporates this feeling. In this section I discuss another cognitive theory of emotion by Peter Goldie. Although Goldie goes beyond bodily feelings and recognizes the need to accommodate a separate and externally-directed component of feeling beyond the body, I argue that a phenomenological understanding of the background feeling of belonging to a world does not fall neatly into an internal and external distinction of feeling.

In *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, Peter Goldie's means of incorporating feeling into emotional experience places his theory in contrast with other cognitive theories of emotion, like Solomon's. Goldie describes many of the philosophical approaches to emotion as the "add-on theory" of emotions: they capture the intentionality of emotion, but the feeling component of emotional experience is usually done by reference to feelings directed toward the

body.<sup>1</sup> Feelings are the most intimate part of emotional experience, yet when philosophers discuss the intentionality of emotion, feelings often become compartmentalized into physiological categories and separated from the emotion's intentional component in a way that detracts from the emotional experience. Goldie states that it is rationalizing the emotions in this way—reducing emotions to cognitive states, emotional contagion, and evaluative judgments—that often over-intellectualizes the emotions by excluding feeling.<sup>2</sup> Feelings are not only essential for directing, motivating, and shaping an initial emotional response, they make emotional judgments easier and quicker. Goldie provides an example of a piece of rotten, maggot-infested meat. The fact the piece of meat is rotten is justification for not eating it, but the immediate feelings of repulsiveness and disgust that motivate that judgment are also justified by the same fact, and it is the speed by which feelings reveal these particular salient features of the meat that we might not reach with the same speed by a judgment alone.<sup>3</sup> Instead of limiting feeling to a physiological role, what sets Goldie's cognitive theory apart from Solomon's is he posits two types of emotional feelings that appear to be at work within this example. The first is the internal feeling of disgust and repulsiveness directed toward the body. The second type of feeling is the external feeling of disgust and repulsiveness directed outwards towards the emotion's object, the piece of meat.

Feelings play a central and epistemic role in revealing the nature of our world through emotional experience. Some feelings, such as a bodily feeling of fear, disclose an introspective and qualitative understanding of the nature of perceived bodily changes within particular emotions we are experiencing at that time. In that a bodily feeling can detect changes in the condition of the body during an emotional experience, they are intentional in that they are

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1. Goldie, "Emotions, Feelings and Intentionality," 242.

2. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 50.

3. Goldie, "Emotion, Feeling, and Knowledge," 98.

directed towards the body. While a bodily feeling manifests a sensation of perceived bodily changes, what they reveal may not be strictly limited to the body. They may also bring awareness to the presence of something outside of the body. The bodily feeling of fear may manifest itself as a rise in the hairs on the back of the neck or an increase in heart rate, but such a sensation also discloses that there is something fearful within the vicinity. As they are directed towards the body, a bodily feeling will never be able to identify what that fearful object outside the body is, but such a feeling does provide a tentative justification to believe there exists something fearful nearby. While bodily feelings disclose an introspective understanding of our emotions directed toward the body, other feelings disclose an “extraspective” understanding of the world directed toward objects outside of the body.<sup>4</sup>

In order to expand upon the “add-on theory” of emotions, Goldie posits that when an emotion is directed towards an object outside of the body, one is experiencing a “feeling towards” an object. What has been overlooked in other cognitive theories of emotion is the notion of content, the perceived determinate properties of an object that provide justification for the subject’s way of thinking.<sup>5</sup> Using his example of the piece of rotten meat, the emotion involved a judgment that found the meat meriting disgust, and while this captures the intentional aspect of emotional experience, Goldie suggests the “extraspective directedness toward the world outside one’s body, will at the same time capture an important aspect of its phenomenology.”<sup>6, 7</sup> One does not simply judge the piece of meat as meriting disgust but simultaneously perceives the

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4. Goldie, “Emotion, Feeling, and Knowledge,” 92.

5. Goldie, “Emotions, Feelings and Intentionality,” 241.

6. Goldie, “Emotion, Feeling, and Knowledge,” 97.

7. Phenomenology in this context refers to the capturing of what an emotional experience is like by reference to its first-person, qualitative character and not phenomenology as a philosophical methodology. This distinction is important in understanding the “phenomenological component” of Goldie’s “feeling towards” as a means of expanding upon the add-on theory of emotions by including feelings as an inextricable aspect of a world-directed emotional experience and in distinguishing between the phenomenological and intentional components of emotional experience.

object's determinate properties, such as the putrid smell or maggot infestation, that allow one to perceive the object's content as disgusting. Judging the meat to be disgusting represents the intentional aspect of this emotional experience, but arriving at the judgment with disgust, perceiving the object's content as disgusting, captures a phenomenological component of feeling Goldie calls "feeling towards." The phenomenological and intentional components of emotional experience, Goldie says, are inextricably intertwined.

What lies at the forefront of Goldie's cognitive theory of emotion is the primacy he provides for feelings in emotional experience. Previously we saw what Solomon meant by feelings was limited to bodily feeling as physiological responses, and apart from perhaps providing a conscious arousal to the fact one is experiencing an emotion, Solomon's bodily feelings did little in telling us what emotions were about. Goldie's theory provides emotional experience with both bodily feelings and feelings towards in a way that captures the bodily and world-directed intentionality of emotion as well as a phenomenological component of feeling. Goldie is correct in recognizing the need that a theory of emotion must accommodate an externally-directed component of feeling beyond the body, but like Solomon's theory, I believe it again becomes unclear how his two components of feeling, bodily feelings and feelings towards, combine to account for a background feeling of belonging to a world.

It remains unclear how these components of feeling accommodate the background feeling of belonging to a world, first, because it often remains unclear what constitutes the distinction between these two types of feeling in the first place. Goldie states explicitly that a feeling towards does not involve bodily feelings as they lack the required "direct" intentionality with the emotion's object outside the body, so a provisional distinction here has already been established. However, Goldie allows bodily feelings a sense of what he calls "borrowed intentionality," a



bodily feeling ultimately coming to be about the object of the emotion: “all the feelings are ‘united in consciousness’ in being directed towards its object: united ‘body and soul’, ‘heart and mind’.”<sup>8</sup> The bodily feeling of the hairs rising on the back of the neck alerting the body to the presence of something fearful nearby “borrows” from the judgment that an object outside the body has been perceived as fearful. While for Goldie bodily feelings and the world-directed feelings towards represent two distinct categories of feelings, from an experiential perspective the two are often experienced as indistinguishable. For this reason, if from an experiential perspective both bodily feelings and feeling towards are often united in emotional experience in a way that is indistinguishable, it appears that what is needed is a phenomenology of feeling that does not make a distinction between these two types of feelings.

Second, Goldie’s two components of feeling are both directed towards objects through intentional states, and whether or not the experience of these two components may be experientially indistinguishable, it remains unclear what motivates a feeling towards without reference to a background structure. When one experiences a feeling towards an object, fear for example, one perceives certain determinate properties about that object that explain why one experiences the associated feelings of fear. But what orientates a feeling towards that allows one to react to an object’s determinate properties in a personal and relevant way? Goldie states that a feeling towards is an “unreflective emotional engagement with the world,” and as such, they are unlike other psychological phenomenon that can be reduced to attitudes, beliefs, or desires.<sup>9, 10</sup> Unlike a belief, it would not be irrational for a feeling towards to oscillate between feeling one way toward a particular object and not feeling that way, as feelings often fluctuate during

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8. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 55.

9. Goldie, “Emotions, Feelings and Intentionality,” 241.

10. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 6.

emotional experiences.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, one may believe there is nothing to fear when perceiving a particular object, such as seeing a needle in a medical clinic, yet remain disposed to feel a rush of fear whenever the object is present. This is due to a degree of what Goldie calls “cognitive impenetrability,” the extent to which one’s emotional experience is unaffected by one’s relevant beliefs. Recall from chapter one that Solomon’s evaluative judgments acquired a degree of personal responsibility in that an evaluative judgment is susceptible to rational intervention. But being cognitively impenetrable, such rational reflection or intervention does not appear to be the case with a feeling towards. For this reason it remains unclear what motivates a feeling towards without reference to a background structure that remains an ever-present context from which such feelings may be motivated.

Although Goldie goes beyond bodily feelings and recognizes the need to accommodate a separate and externally-directed component of feeling beyond the body, I argue that it remains unclear, first, whether or not we are able to make a clear distinction between internal and external components of feeling, and second, it remains unclear what motivates a feeling towards without reference to an underlying structure in which one is already inhabited prior to an emotional experience. Just as Solomon’s generalized mood was unable to account for a background feeling of belonging to a world out of which a mood arises, a phenomenological understanding of this same feeling does not fall neatly into Goldie’s internal and external distinction of feeling. In the next section I consider how an internal and external distinction of feeling reflects a tendency in philosophy to obscure a fundamental understanding of the background structure and the world in which we already find ourselves prior to an emotional experience. I draw on the work of Edmund Husserl’s conception of the “natural attitude” to demonstrate how everyday experience presupposes a background feeling of belonging to a world

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11. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 73.

that structures the variety of ways through which objects in the world may be experienced.

### Chapter III: Husserl, the Natural Attitude, and the Background of Experience

The current task is to explicate further the underlying structure through which one already finds oneself belonging to a world prior to an emotional experience. I argue that perceptual and cognitive theories of emotion maintain a tendency in philosophy to assume as irreducible this underlying structure, and I use Edmund Husserl's criticism of naturalistic methodology to identify the perspective through which many of these theories formulate an understanding of the world through propositional attitudes. All cognitive activity presupposes a sense of what it means for an object to be in a world. The world is not an object articulated through intentional states, and a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world lies as a precondition for taking objects through intentional states.

In the first section I gave a brief example of Stephanie D. Preston and Frans B. M. de Waal's Perception-Action Model (PAM) theory to highlight some of the recent developments within the perceptual and cognitive theories of emotion. In *Empathy: Its Ultimate and Proximate Bases*, Preston and de Waal state the PAM theory, together with prefrontal cortex functioning, provides an empirical account of how the perception of another's affective state generates a process of automatic responses within the prefrontal cortex that then primes the corresponding subclass of perception-act mechanisms to create a representation of the other's affective state in the observer.<sup>1</sup> Preston and de Waal's PAM theory provides a basis for understanding the development of subject-object perception of experiential changes in terms of their evolutionary

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1. Preston and de Waal, "Empathy," 4.

advantages in reproductive success and social behavior, such as mother-infant responsiveness and interpersonal emotion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in that it provides a basis for subject-object perception of experiential change, the PAM theory may plausibly be extended to account for the evolutionary advantages of group interdependence in perceiving our world through experienced states of similarity, familiarity, and practicality.<sup>3</sup>

The PAM theory provides an example of how perception-based theories of emotion help conceptualize the experiential structures through which the world becomes intelligible in everyday experience, and it is upon these experiential structures that we find cognitive theories of emotion, like Solomon's and Goldie's, assuming as irreducible the intentionality of subject-object relationships and propositional framework through which their theories depend. I have attempted to make clear what is needed is a phenomenology of feeling that recognizes a background world is already in place before anything is given within a propositional framework. The PAM theory may be able to explicate the process through which, for example, one may perceive in an object the determinate properties that provide the content of fear, and a cognitive theory of emotion may be able to explicate how this fearful content manifests itself in the mind as an evaluative judgment of fear. But to say that an object is or is not something to be feared is already presupposing a sense of what it means for this object to "be" in a world. This act of judgment requires something underlying, a pre-intentional background that presupposes what it means for an object to be in a world and structures the possible ways in which it may be experienced.

Naturalistic and scientific accounts of the world often maintain a tendency to presuppose a world that is already disclosed prior to scientific inquiry. Within the term "naturalism," in this

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2. Preston and de Waal, "Empathy," 1.

3. *Ibid.*, 5.

context, I refer specifically to the concern regarding the relationship between an empirical account of the world and our experience of that world. By already being in a world, naturalism often presupposes the intelligibility of the world that it takes as its object of inquiry. For example, science does not begin from nothing but rather is already immersed in a world. The scientific method, as a human achievement, already has its grounding in a human world. It is in this light that scientific questioning begins with an “epistemically privileged” and detached perspective in understanding the world.<sup>4</sup> The perspective becomes “detached” by the fact that a scientific method investigating the world or human experience reduces each to the observation of a “thing,” and to consider Anita Williams, “we cannot ask questions about the meaningfulness of human experience, as our experience loses its defining qualities when conceived of as a measurable entity.”<sup>5</sup> Scientific methodology allows for the investigation of our world through this detached perspective, and in doing so it must presuppose a background sense of belonging to a world, a world already inhabited by objects. Thus, through a scientific methodology there is a pre-intentional background sense of a world that becomes neglected. Edmund Husserl was critical of the grounding of scientific methodology and the metaphysical limitations placed on an understanding of our world through this perspective. From a phenomenological perspective, this pre-intentional background becomes taken for granted in what Husserl called the “natural attitude.”

The natural attitude is neither a good thing nor a bad thing but simply the ordinary way we see things in everyday experience. In that each person inhabits a unique perceptual standpoint, no two people will ever dwell in the same natural attitude. Dwelling in the natural attitude, we are unaware that we are participating in it and the role it plays in shaping the world

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4. Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 50.

5. Williams, “The Importance of Distinguishing,” 236.

around us. Objects in everyday experience are not encountered first as corporeal, unfamiliar entities upon which we then imbue with practicality and significance through propositional subject-object relationships. Because we are dwelling in the natural attitude, objects in everyday experience are already encountered within a context of practicality and significance: “This world is there for me not only as a world of mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world. I simply find the physical things in front of me furnished not only with merely material determinations but also with value characteristics...”<sup>6</sup> However, dwelling in the natural attitude masks a profound naivety. We take for granted a perceptual certainty of our familiar world. There is a naïve acceptance of the world and the unity of things appearing as factually existing actualities. The observation of an object within the natural attitude is to recognize only what is factually present before me. We take for granted, for example, that maintaining the proposition “ $x$  observes  $p$ ” must presuppose a sense of what it means for  $p$  to be the case in a world, a sense that is inclusive of other possibilities of being. What becomes taken for granted by everyday experience is a pre-intentional background sense of reality and perceptual certainty that frames our experience of objects within the world.

This pre-intentional background sense of reality and certainty is not something that may be understood in terms of intentional states because it is this pre-intentional background sense of reality that structures specific experiences and beliefs. We may say, as Somogy Varga puts it, that experience has two interconnected poles, “a pre-intentional relation to the world that makes up the tacit background of any experience, and the intentional relation we have when we experience an object.”<sup>7</sup> The world that makes up the tacit background of any experience conditions our taking of objects through intentional states. Using the previous example, the

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6. Husserl, *Pure Phenomenology*, 53.

7. Varga, “Depersonalization,” 106.

proposition “ $x$  observes  $p$ ,” to believe  $p$  to be a real object under my observation requires a sense that is founded upon what it means for something like  $p$  to “be” in a world: “the pre-intentional sense of realness and certainty is a precondition for adopting any propositional attitude; it carries the sense of what it is for something to be the case.”<sup>8</sup> A scientific methodology, already immersed in a world, taking its starting point from within the natural attitude would inevitably misconstrue the intentional nature of consciousness in a reduction to factuality.<sup>9</sup> By the reduction of things to factually existing actualities, a scientific perspective realizes a “detached” perspective in its observation of our world as an object.

Husserl’s critique of a scientific methodology highlights the need for a phenomenological approach that puts aside our naïve acceptance of reality in order to understand a domain of consciousness left unreflective by the natural attitude. Scientific methodology, rather than investigating how objects are constituted before us, begins by presupposing the reality and certainty of objects through the natural attitude. But to place emphasis on a scientific understanding of the world, Husserl claims, obscures the fact that before a judgment is made of an object, there is an implicit understanding of what it means for this object to be in a world that is not exhausted by its observation within the natural attitude. Husserl explains that “objects are always pre-given to us, pre-given in simple certainty, before we engage in any act of cognition. At its beginning, every cognitive activity presupposes these objects. They are there for us in simple certainty; this means that we presume them to exist and in such a way as to be accepted by us before all cognition, and this is in a variety of ways.”<sup>10</sup> The world in which we already find ourselves is neither something that can be understood through nor articulated by the propositional subject-object relationships of the natural attitude: “the world as the existent world

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8. Varga, “Depersonalization,” 107.

9. Moran, “Husserl’s Transcendental Philosophy,” 402.

10. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 29.



is the universal passive pre-givenness of all judicative activity, of all engagement of theoretical interest.”<sup>11</sup>

From this perspective we may see a similar critique at work in a cognitivist theory of emotion, such as Solomon’s. For example, it did not appear that Solomon’s positing of a two-world distinction to accommodate our experience of a personal world, reality and surreality, was able to explicate how evaluative judgments arise within a context of meaning without accounting for a background sense of belonging to a world already inhabited when an evaluative judgment is made. Within the experiential structures of many cognitive theories of emotion, like Solomon’s and Goldie’s, the intentionality of subject-object distinctions and propositional framework are often assumed as irreducible, a perspective similar to the one we adopt through the natural attitude. This position highlights the need for a phenomenological approach that recognizes a background world that can never be objectified through the structures of intentionality.

I have stated many of our emotional experiences presuppose a background feeling of belonging to a world that shapes the possible ways through which objects in the world may be experienced during an emotion. The world in this sense is not an object articulated through propositional subject-object relationships but rather lies pre-given before a judgment is made and presupposed through the natural attitude. Neither is the background feeling of belonging to a world able to be expressed through bodily feelings, feeling towards, the Perception-Action Model, nor any combination of intentional states. These background feelings of belonging to a world are not directed at particular objects but shape the possible ways objects show up within a space of practical and meaningful significance. A theory that perhaps best summarizes this type of feeling is Matthew Ratcliffe’s account of “existential feelings.” In the next section I develop a phenomenological approach using existential feelings in order to overcome some of the

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11. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 31.

challenges facing a cognitivist view of emotions.

## **Chapter IV: Ratcliffe, Our Sense of Reality, and Existential Feelings**

When we have an emotional experience, we have already found ourselves in a world. In this section I define a “world” in this context and use Matthew Ratcliffe’s theory of “existential feelings” to demonstrate what shapes and motivates a background structure within the context of a world. Existential feelings operate as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world that shapes much of our experience of the world. I provide four examples of existential feelings. In the first two I compare and contrast existential feelings of hope and hopelessness. In both examples I demonstrate how existential feelings operate as a category of feeling that permeates all cognitive activity and contributes to a sense of relatedness with the world. In the last two I use alterations in everyday activities and perturbations of reality through mental illness to provide examples of how existential feelings, operating indiscernibly in the background of experience, may be forced to the foreground of experience. I conclude by returning to Solomon and Goldie to highlight some of the challenges faced by a cognitivist view and how developing a phenomenological approach using existential feelings may allay some of these concerns.

I have stated that much of our emotional experience presupposes a sense of belonging to a world, but what exactly is a “world” in this context? Like Husserl, Matthew Ratcliffe similarly attempts a phenomenological understanding of a world that many naturalistic and scientific accounts neglect and presuppose by taking the world as an object of study. Consider the experience of perceiving a cat.<sup>1</sup> Even upon recognition of the cat as being present or not present,

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1. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology, Naturalism, and Reality,” 9.

all such judgments presuppose a sense of what it is to “be” in a world. For example, we may experience the cat as being “there,” present alongside us in a world, but this experience of the cat as being “there” is phenomenologically distinct from other possible forms of experience, such as imagining or doubting the cat. These distinctions are intrinsic to the nature of experience—we experience possibilities—and without the ability to grasp distinctions in possible forms of experience we would be unable to take any entity as being or not being real. Sensing the cat as being real, being “there,” carries with it a pre-intentional background sense of what it means for something like a cat to “be” that cannot be reduced to intentional states. The ability to find intelligible these distinctions in possibility is what Ratcliffe calls our “sense of reality.” The world in this context is a space of possibilities that constitutes our sense of reality, a pre-intentional background that is taken for granted by the experience of an entity as being “there.”

The world we find ourselves belonging to is a modal space that incorporates various kinds of possibilities and potentialities that frame the various ways we encounter objects. These possibilities are an integral part of the way in which we experience the world. Ratcliffe explains that experience incorporates various kinds of possibility, such as habitual certainty.<sup>2</sup> For example, I take for granted the solidity of the floor remains constant while walking upon it. Other possibilities form anticipations of what an entity is, such as the uncertainty of a shadowed figure in the dark. However, Ratcliffe says the phenomenology of possibility does not restrict us to the potential perceptions of scenarios that we could actualize or things we could do. Experience also incorporates ways in which possibilities appear significant to us. Possibilities may appear significant to us in various ways, such as enticing or threatening. Possibilities do not only present themselves in the form “I could do *p*,” instead, they lure us in such a way that their perception reflects our various practical concerns so that “how something is significant to us,

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2. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology of Existential Feeling,” 8.

how it ‘matters’ to us, is at the same time a sense of the possibilities it has to offer.”<sup>3</sup> The experience of observing a beautiful sunset, for example, may inspire a feeling of awe in a way that reveals the sunset not only in terms of possibilities, such as the possibility of viewing the sunset, but also in terms of personal significance that is reflected by my finding the sunset to be beautiful and awe-inspiring.

Ratcliffe coins the term “existential feelings” to describe our sense of the various kinds of possibilities that make up our sense of reality. Existential feelings constitute this background sense of belonging to a world, a world that exists as a modal space of possibilities that appear to us in personal and meaningful ways. They shape the possible ways in which objects may be meaningfully experienced, ways that reflect our personal and practical concerns. They are inextricable from our sense of reality in that they “determine what kinds of intentional states are among one’s possibilities.”<sup>4</sup>

Existential feelings constitute a background sense of belonging and relating to a world through which all cognitive activity is structured. To illustrate this point further, compare the following four examples of existential feelings. In the first two I compare and contrast existential feelings of hope and hopelessness. Existential feelings in both examples demonstrate a category of feeling that permeates all thought and activity and contribute to a sense of relatedness with the world. For the most part, existential feelings operate indiscernibly as a backdrop to our everyday lives. In the last two examples I use alterations in everyday activities and perturbations of reality through mental illness to provide examples of how existential feelings may be forced to the foreground of experience.

In the first example, consider Ariel Meirav’s example of the effect of hope on a

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3. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology, Naturalism, and Reality,” 77.

4. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology of Existential Feeling,” 10.

terminally ill patient. Even if the odds of a cure were low, the patient may find herself experiencing an “intense hope that expresses itself in high spirits, active cooperation with the doctors, and enthusiastic engagement in long-term creative or scholarly projects, in spite of the difficulties. Her emotional and motivational attitudes seem to reflect some kind of positive view of the future.”<sup>5</sup> Hope, in this example, manifests as a profound change in the patient’s relationship with the world, a change that casts a positive light on all her interactions with others and shapes the various possibilities for future-oriented activities in a positive way. Hope as an existential feeling plays a distinctive phenomenological role compared to other emotions.<sup>6</sup> Hope has contributed to the way the patient finds herself in the world and shaped her experience of the illness and her thoughts toward treatment. In this case, hope is not an intentional state concerned with specific instances of hope but a background feeling that allows the patient to experience her circumstances in a positive and meaningful way that is hopeful.

Second, consider the effect of hopelessness in a patient diagnosed with major depressive disorder. Hopelessness in clinical depression is not episodic in that it manifests during brief episodes or towards particular objects. According to the DSM-5, major depressive disorder presents feelings of sadness, emptiness, or hopelessness most of the day, nearly every day, with an accompanied loss of pleasure in nearly all activities.<sup>7</sup> Although one may be hopeless regarding a specific situation, hopelessness in this sense is not a feeling about something specific nor is it a generalized mood that covers specific or large numbers of objects. It represents a shift in the structure of experience. Discussing hopelessness and despair, Anthony Steinbock presents

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5. Meirav, “The Nature of Hope,” 1.

6. “Phenomenological” in this context, like in chapter two, refers to the capturing of what an emotional experience is like by reference to its subjective, first-person character rather than phenomenology as a philosophical methodology. Specifically, I am referencing the distinctive “what-it-is-likeness” and “felt” character of hope as an existential feeling that permeates all of experience compared to an emotion as an intentional state.

7. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 160-168.

this shift as a loss of grounding for sustainable hope: “I do not just give up doing this or that...I give up altogether. I may wish that things were different, but I cannot hope. It is not just that this one particular thing is not sustainable; it is not just that all things are lived as impossible; rather, there is no sustainability.”<sup>8</sup> Like with hope, hopelessness as an existential feeling is pre-intentional and characterized by the distinctive role it plays in shaping a patient’s sense of what is possible. In hopelessness the world is no longer a space of meaningful and enticing possibilities. Hopelessness as an existential feeling shapes the world in a way that diminishes the patient’s sense of belonging and prevents a future-oriented grounding for sustainable hope.

In the next two examples, consider how a disturbance in an activity or perturbations of reality through mental illness disrupt the role existential feelings play as part of the background structure and unity of experience. For the most part, however, this background structure remains obscured behind everyday experience within the natural attitude, and if it were not for disturbances and perturbations in our everyday experience, we might remain oblivious to it. In the third example, if we use an example of a disturbance to remove the context of practicality and intelligibility from the experience of an object, then encountering this object would be a significantly different experience. Most of the objects we encounter in everyday experience are not really “encountered” at all but rather seamlessly absorbed into our activities. Consider Ratcliffe’s example of using a computer keyboard: “I do not first perceive the keys as discrete entities, then assign a functional role to them and finally act upon them. Rather, I encounter the keyboard as something useable, as something that has immediate practical significance in the context of my project.”<sup>9</sup> Not only does everyday experience integrate the keyboard into the unity of experience but I too am integrated into the experience. There is no clear distinction between

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8. Steinbock, “The Phenomenology of Despair,” 447.

9. Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 44.

the keyboard and me. However, consider a case where the keyboard suddenly fails to function. My body that had once lied inconspicuously within the unity of experience is all of sudden brought to the foreground. My body, now as a conspicuous entity, disrupts the absorption of the world through the body. It is in moments of disturbances that Ratcliff says the “conspicuous body is, at the same time, a change in the sense of belonging to the world, often a retreat from a significant project in which one was previously immersed, a loss of practical possibilities that the world previously offered.”<sup>10</sup> The disturbance reveals, if only briefly, a background sense of belonging to a world that we take for granted by the unity of experience.

In the fourth example, take the perturbations in one’s experience of reality through mental illness, such as clinical depression. Through everyday experience we encounter objects within a context of significance, presupposing a space of certain possibilities through which existential feelings allow objects to matter to us in significant ways. Consider Aaron Beck’s description of depression: “The thought content of depressed patients centers on a significant loss. The patient perceives that he has lost something he considers essential to his happiness or tranquility; he anticipates negative outcomes from any important undertaking...”<sup>11</sup> Through depression the patient’s sense of belonging to a world is transformed, not only removing from the world various kinds of possibilities the patient might otherwise purposively pursue but also the ability to find happiness in anything. Possibilities that may once have appeared as enticing no longer appear as such. Patients gradually lose the sense that anything might offer happiness. Severe depression often produces changes in a patient’s experience of time in that this transformation of possibilities results in the anticipation of “negative outcomes from any important undertaking” in a way that removes the grounding for hope, and recovery appears

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10. Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 125.

11. Beck, “Cognitivist Analysis of Depression,” 318.



impossible. The loss of orientation toward future possibilities makes the experience of depression feel eternal. Perturbations in existential feelings result in a transformation in how one finds oneself in a world, and central to this transformation is an alteration in the perceived sense of possibilities.

Using existential feelings as the basis for a phenomenological approach to understanding emotions allow us to focus on one aspect of emotion that has been largely neglected by a cognitivist view of emotion. In the first and second chapters I introduced two cognitivist theories of emotion, Solomon and Goldie, both of which left unclear how emotions as intentional states arise within a personal and meaningful context. What appears to be neglected is that, when we have an emotional experience, we have already found ourselves with a background sense of belonging to a world. This background sense of belonging to a world that existential feelings provide makes possible that specific occurrences of emotion are able to arise in a personal and meaningful context. In that they constitute a background sense of belonging, they are unlike emotions represented through a cognitivist perspective. In the following, I return to Solomon and Goldie and adopt a phenomenological approach to explore two ways existential feelings address the challenges facing each cognitivist view respectively.

In the first chapter I stated Solomon's theory held, first, that emotions were always about something, meaning emotions always take objects through intentional states. Second, it was emotions as evaluative judgments that structured our reality to make objects what they are through emotional experience: I did not first encounter a snake and then determine it to be frightening; rather, an emotion structured my reality in a way that I immediately experience a frightening snake. Following an evaluative judgment was the affective component of emotional experience, a physiological response that played no significant role in emotional experience for

Solomon. The ways objects appear to us through our emotions in our personal world, surreality, reflect what we hold to be personally meaningful and significant. Thus, emotions as evaluative judgments, not feelings, provide the source of meaning in our personal lives. However, by limiting feelings to bodily feelings, I argued the primary challenge facing Solomon's theory was that it remained unclear how evaluative judgments contain within them the sole source of meaning of our experienced world.

In doing away with feeling as a significant component of emotion, Solomon's challenge was regarding how evaluative judgments arise within a context of meaning and value out of an objective world bereft of such meaning. Addressing this challenge begins with the division of experience through Solomon's two-world distinction, reality and surreality. It appears Solomon's two-world distinction is a result of addressing a dualistic concern within a cognitivist view of emotion, where emotional experience is divided into two components with an affective component on one side and an intentional component on the other. The first component is subjective while the second is objective, involving objects in the world. A peculiarity of this division becomes evident when we consider an example where the object of an emotion appears either not to exist or is not true.<sup>12</sup> Recall from the aircraft example that the aircraft as a fearful object need not constitute a "fact" in the real world but only my belief that the aircraft posed a threat, nor did the object need to be true as I was only able to maintain the aircraft as a fearful object until either landing or realizing the aircraft posed no danger, therefore terminating the emotion. Thus a paradox arises regarding how an object of emotion may be "in the world" without existing or being true. Solomon's answer to this paradox is his two-world distinction: "There are rather two standpoints, one detached and one personally involved. All objects of our

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12. Solomon, *The Passions*, 113.

emotions are in surreality: Reality is irrelevant except on reflection.”<sup>13</sup> If it is an emotion that shapes an object to be what it is, then objects of our emotions need not be factually existing entities in reality but rather constituted by an emotion through our surreality.

However, from a phenomenological perspective there remains a position within Solomon’s account that remains to be challenged. I have stated that within a cognitivist view of emotions we find a tendency to assume as irreducible the intentional structures through which these theories operate. It is in this light that, rather than addressing a dualistic concern, Solomon’s positing of surreality appears as a continuation of the divisional separation a dualistic perspective places on our understanding of emotional experience within a world. Surreality posits an additional “attitude” through which the world is experienced through intentional states. In this case, we are still dwelling within the natural attitude when we experience an emotion through our surreality. Solomon’s emotions are always about something, and as such, surreality continues a description of our world from a detached perspective by limiting our understanding of the nature of emotional experience to the taking of objects through intentional states. Surreality appears to solve one issue by absolving the need for objects of emotion to be factually existing entities, but it remains unclear whether or not this is sufficient to overcome the remaining challenges faced by the natural attitude. What Solomon’s two-world distinction appears to take for granted is a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world that operates as a background context through which emotions source their meaning and personal significance.

It is from this phenomenological perspective that existential feelings proffer a resolution to the challenge faced by Solomon. Existential feelings are unlike the emotions in Solomon’s account. Emotions generally take the form of intentional states while existential feelings

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13. Solomon, *The Passions*, 115.

represent a category of feeling that amounts to a felt sense of belonging to a world.<sup>14</sup> Existential feelings are not about something: “whereas emotions are usually directed towards specific objects, events or situations, existential feelings are not about anything specific.”<sup>15</sup> One is already in a world when one experiences an emotion, and for this reason emotions may develop intentional states involving bodily or world-directed feelings. As part of the background structure of intentionality, existential feelings are pre-intentional in that they constitute a sense of the kinds of possibility the world offers through propositional subject-object relationships. Using the previous example of hope, we are able to distinguish between hope as an intentional state and hope as an existential feeling that permeates all of one’s thoughts and experiences. The experience of hope presupposes distinctive kinds of possibilities. In order to experience hope as an intentional state, one must already find oneself in a world where hope is not only a possibility but a possibility where oneself has to matter in a certain sort of way.<sup>16, 17</sup> In attempting to have emotions constitute the framework through which our world is experienced, Solomon’s surreality obscures this important distinction between instances of emotion and a pre-intentional background in a way that existential feelings do not. In doing away with feeling, Solomon’s surreality appears unable to accommodate the unique way in which we belong to a world that presupposes distinctive kinds of possibilities, such as hope.

In the second chapter, Goldie’s primary contribution to the cognitivist perspective was recognition of the phenomenological component of emotion, the capturing of a first-personal qualitative “what-it-is-likeness” of emotional experience.<sup>18</sup> This contribution went beyond a traditional cognitivist view of emotion that highlights the intentional component of emotional

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14. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology of Existential Feeling,” 3.

15. Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 40.

16. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology of Mood and Life,” 351.

17. Ratcliffe, “Phenomenology and Neurobiology,” 129.

18. Mitchell, “Intentionality and Intelligibility,” 118.

experience while compartmentalizing the affective component through physiological categories of bodily feelings. While bodily feelings may provide an introspective understanding of the body during an emotional experience, Goldie recognized an extraspective category of feeling directed towards the world outside the body through what he called feeling towards. In the second chapter I argued the challenge facing Goldie is two-fold. In recognition of these two categories of feeling, the first challenge facing Goldie's theory is one he appears implicitly to acknowledge. During an emotional experience, these two categories of feeling, bodily feeling and feelings towards, are often indistinguishable. Thus it becomes unclear whether or not a phenomenology of feeling is able to make a clear distinction between these two types of feeling. Second, as a feeling towards remained an unreflective psychological phenomenon, an additional challenge remained as to what motivates a feeling towards without reference to a background sense of belonging to a world.

In recognizing the phenomenological component of emotional experience, Goldie faced a challenge in distinguishing between a bodily feeling that contributes to the emotional experience through "borrowing" from the emotion's world-directed intentionality and a feeling towards. There are times during an emotional experience where "our entire mind and body is engaged in the emotional experience..."<sup>19</sup> It became unclear whether or not a phenomenology of feeling is able to distinguish between these two types of feelings during an emotional experience. However, addressing this challenge may not be whether or not from a phenomenological approach we are able to make a clear distinction between these two types of feeling but instead whether or not we may be able to identify cases where these two categories are, at least in some cases, two perspectives of the same thing.

An inextricable element of Ratcliffe's sense of reality is a "felt" sense of belonging to

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19. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 55.

world. Often much of the literature we use to describe existential feelings, such as a sense of unfamiliarity or uneasiness, incorporates a sense of something both “felt” and at the same time a way of relating to a world. There are emotions that involve feelings directed towards the body and there are emotions that involve feelings directed towards objects outside the body. Ratcliffe, however, is critical of the distinction between bodily and world-directed components of feeling, since as it appears at least in some cases such as a sense of unfamiliarity, there is not a clear distinction between these two types of feeling during an emotional experience. For cases like this Ratcliffe suggests that Goldie’s two components of feeling, bodily feelings and feelings towards, may represent a sort of “double counting” of feelings; bodily feelings are just feelings towards. Ratcliffe gives the example of holding a snowball.<sup>20</sup> The snowball feels cold. In this example the hand begins as the vehicle of perception through which the snowball is perceived. But within a few seconds the feeling of the cold snowball begins to grow too cold, the hand starts to ache with pain, and the experience becomes unpleasant. It is no longer the snowball that is perceived but the hand, a feeling now directed toward the body. There has never been a change in the location of the feeling; it has always remained in the hand. There has only been a change in what it is a feeling of. The hand can be the vehicle through which an object in the world is felt or the hand can become the object that is felt. “To touch,” Ratcliffe says, “is to experience a relation between one’s body and an object it comes into contact with...One’s body can be a conspicuous object of awareness or an invisible context of tactile activity.”<sup>21</sup> In touching the snowball, rather than drawing a distinction between bodily feelings and world directed feelings, a bodily feeling became a means of experiencing something outside the body, a matter of relatedness between the body and the world. Feelings of the body and feelings of an object are two perspectives of the

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20. Ratcliffe, “The Feeling of Being,” 47-48.

21. *Ibid.*, 48.

same thing: “existential feelings are feelings in the body, which are experienced as one’s relationship with the world as a whole.”<sup>22</sup> The body may not always be an explicit part of experience, but it nevertheless remains a framework through which the world is structured. For this reason, existential feelings are also bodily feelings which are experienced as one’s relationship with the world, recognition of which poses a serious challenge to Goldie’s internal and external division of feeling. This also explains why an alteration in existential feelings, such as a sense of uneasiness, may manifest as both a shift in perceived possibilities and a “felt” sense of uneasiness in the body.

The second part of the two-fold challenge to Goldie’s position stated that if a feeling towards remained an unreflective psychological phenomenon, then what motivates a feeling towards without reference to a background sense of belonging to a world? In chapter two I stated that a feeling towards, being an “unreflective emotional engagement with the world,” maintained a degree of what Goldie called cognitive impenetrability. In this case feeling towards were largely unaffected by one’s relevant beliefs. For example, we saw in chapter one that an evaluative judgment acquired a degree of personal responsibility in that an evaluative judgment is susceptible to rational intervention. But being cognitively impenetrable, such intervention does not appear to be the case with a feeling towards. Goldie provides a brief discussion of what may be the psychological structure lying behind a feeling towards, the “recognition-response tie,” which posits a primitive relationship between recognition and response that configures an emotionally motivated response to a perceived object.<sup>23</sup> For example, the perception and recognition of an object’s determinate properties as dangerous merit a particular sort of response, particularly fear. Still, this leaves further questions regarding what orientates a recognition-

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22. Ratcliffe, “The Feeling of Being,” 49.

23. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 11.

response tie to allow one to react to a perceived object's determinate properties in ways not just relevant to a specific scenario but ways that are personal and meaningful. Thus it became unclear what motivates a feeling towards without positing a background structure that remains an ever-present context from which such feelings may be motivated in personal and meaningful ways.

It may be that existential feelings proffer a perspective from which this challenge may be addressed. Goldie's recognition of the phenomenological component in emotional experience puts him a step closer than Solomon in acknowledging feeling as inextricable from the world-directed aspect of emotion. While Goldie maintains that bodily feelings cannot have world-directed intentionality, they may contribute through a sense of borrowed intentionality in such a way that both bodily feelings and feelings towards, at least in some cases, become experientially indistinguishable in emotional experience. Indistinguishable as they may be, bodily feelings only "borrowing" from other world-directed intentional states, having no "direct" intentionality of their own, allow Goldie to maintain a division between body and world, specifically with the categorization of feeling through an internal and external distinction, bodily feelings and feelings towards. Questioning this premise, I used the snowball example to demonstrate how the body may directly and actively participate as a means of experiencing something outside the body. The example provided a challenge to Goldie's division between body and world by demonstrating some cases of bodily feelings and feelings toward an object to be two perspectives of the same thing. What appears to be the limiting Goldie's recognition of a background structure is his strict categorization of feeling through an internal and external distinction. From a phenomenological approach, there are cases where no clear distinction is able to be made between these two types of feelings. Thus, in setting aside an internal and external categorization of feeling, it becomes plausible to posit existential feelings as a category of feeling that accounts



for a background structure that is both a bodily feeling and a way of relating to the world.

When we have an emotional experience, we have already found ourselves in a world. The world in this context exists as a modal space of possibilities, and the ability to distinguish between various possibilities through experience is what Ratcliffe calls our sense of reality. Possibilities present themselves not only as opportunities to be actualized but also in terms of significance. Existential feelings are what allow the world to develop within a context of personal significance. Hope and hopelessness as existential feelings demonstrate how existential feelings operate as a background sense of belonging to a world that permeates all cognitive activity and contributes to a sense of relatedness with the world. Existential feelings operate inconspicuously as a backdrop to our everyday lives, but alterations and perturbations in existential feelings contribute to perceived changes in the unity of experience, alter our sense of agency, and affect how all of reality appears. Adopting a phenomenological approach to understanding the background structures of emotion captures a category of feeling that appears to be missing in a cognitivist theory of emotion. Existential feelings operating as part of the background structure of experience provide a more fecund source of meaning and significance in our lives than Solomon's framework of evaluative judgments as well as a means of de-compartmentalizing internal and external distinctions of feelings in Goldie's bodily feelings and feelings towards.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to call attention to some of the shortcomings of a cognitivist theory's incorporation of feeling into a philosophy of emotion. I stated there has been a tendency within certain cognitivist theories to assume as irreducible the intentional structures through which these theories operate. In chapters one and two I used the cognitivist theories of Robert C. Solomon and Peter Goldie to demonstrate how a consequence of this tendency often sees feelings compartmentalized through internal and external distinctions, such as bodily feelings and world-directed feelings. The goal was to bring into focus the notion that prior to all emotional experience we have already found ourselves belonging to a world, and attempts at a phenomenological understanding of a category of feeling as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging to a world prior to experience become obscured or dismissed. I argued this category of feeling appears to be ignored from within the cognitivist perspective.

In chapter three I used Husserl's conception of the natural attitude to suggest developing a phenomenological approach in illuminating the background structure of emotion presupposed by a cognitivist view, ultimately arriving at Matthew Ratcliffe's theory of existential feelings as a means of proposing this approach in chapter four. Through a series of four examples I demonstrated existential feelings operate as a pre-intentional background sense of belonging and relating to a world that shape the possible ways objects may appear to us in personal and meaningful ways. I concluded by returning to Solomon and Goldie to proffer a phenomenological approach using existential feelings to allay some of the challenges facing a

cognitivist view of emotion. I argued existential feelings illuminated the pre-intentional background obscured through Solomon's two-world distinction of emotional experience as well as a means of de-compartmentalizing the internal and external distinctions of feelings found in Goldie's bodily feelings and feelings towards.

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