



Care, Attachments and Concerns

Kevin Mulligan 
Università della Svizzera italiana

Abstract

Müller's account of the way episodic emotions function depends on a contrast between these and what he calls cares, concerns and attachments and the claim that the latter are in several respects prior to the former. The account seems to attribute no normative features to the latter. But this is implausible. If a preference for liberty over social justice is a concern, it is justified if liberty really is more important than social justice.

Cares, attachments and concerns (“CAC” henceforth) loom large in Jean-Moritz Müller's (2019) carefully argued philosophy of emotions. A key feature of these states or dispositions is that they typically endure over periods of time. In this respect, they contrast with episodic emotions and affects (“emotions” henceforth) such as a fleeting admiration, a three-minute outburst of anger or a half an hour of shame. Consider Sam's attachment to her country. It lasts for several years. It is not to be identified with her emotional reactions two or three times a year to what she reads in the papers about what is happening to or in her country (its decline, its humiliations, its losses, its disintegration), although these reactions may be thought to be proper parts of her attachment. Similarly, care about one's health, looks, soul or vocation, not to mention one's cares about others, may last for considerable periods of time.

In order to understand Müller's (2019) account of the relation between CAC and emotions it is important to understand a problem which arises for anyone who, like Müller, takes emotions to be susceptible of justification and takes the justifiers to be or involve the exemplification of value, positive or negative, monadic or comparative, intrinsic or extrinsic, subjective or objective. On this sort of view, Maria's shame about some event in her past is justified only if the event was in fact shameful. But what is it for Maria to grasp the shamefulfulness of this event, something which seems to be required if this is to motivate her shame? On one view,

espoused by many twentieth century philosophers of emotions, the most basic way in which an event in Maria's past can be given to her as shameful is through her shame. On this view, emotions reveal or disclose value or seem to do so. Müller rejects this view, for good reasons. Indeed it is tempting to think that the view confuses the object of an emotion and reasons for or against emoting. One alternative is the view that there is some sort of *sui generis* type of acquaintance with value, intellectual, perceptual or affective, which is nevertheless not any sort of emotion. On this view, emotions depend on and contain acquaintance or apparent acquaintance with value. Müller rejects this view in favour of a third account, which introduces CAC and a type of perception philosophers like to call aspect perception (seeing, hearing, perceiving a duck as a rabbit or as a duck). He writes:

“...my claim that we may sense the significance of things relative to our cares and concerns is not to be understood as positing a kind of *sui generis* awareness, but rather as referring to a specific type of aspectual impression which we enjoy as a result of apprehending something against the background of our cares and concerns. For you to sense the dangerousness of a given object or event is for you to enjoy an impression of a certain type of relational property as a result of apprehending this object against the background of a certain concern for your well-being or for something else you are attached to: the impression is of a specific (in)congruence of things with concerns in virtue of the fact that the concern serves as the psychological background in terms of which the object or event is construed. Similarly, for you to sense the degrading character of an action of yours is for you to apprehend this action in terms of certain values. And to sense the goodness of having completed your goals for the day is to enjoy an impression of the congruence of having completed them with your desire to complete them, which is achieved by apprehending your finished work against the background of this desire. These cases of construal are structurally on a par with the way objects are apprehended in terms of a specific psychological background in ordinary cases of ‘perceiving as’. Just as we register a certain visual resemblance between two things by letting our awareness of one be informed by a specific mental image or concept of the other, we may also register how things bear on our concerns by having our awareness of the former be informed by the latter.” (Müller, 2019, p. 124)

Value as In/congruence

More precisely, “the axiological character of” the “formal objects” of emotions “consists in the positive or negative relevance—the congruence or incongruence—of their bearer with particular cares and concerns.” (Müller, 2019, p. 43) There are certainly relations of congruence or incongruence, harmony and disharmony, between one’s CAC and one’s emotions. And Müller’s book is one of the few which insists on and brings out the importance of such relations. These relations are “internal relations” just like the relations which we notice in the aspect switches and perception which are so important in Müller’s account. (On one account of internal relations, a binary relation *R* is internal iff its relata make it the case that the relation relates them. Examples of internal relations are the relation of *being lighter than* between white and black, the relation of *successor of* which relates 3 and 2).

But if Müller’s account of the values which are the formal objects of emotions is meant to be a reduction (“consists in”), the first thing the reader wants to know is why internal relations of congruence between CAC and emotions are said to be axiological relations. They may *have* value but *are* they axiological relations? The second thing the reader wants to know, as with many another putative philosophical reduction, is just how much of the formal multiplicity of value the in/congruence view is meant to capture and whether the attempt is successful. Is it supposed to do justice to comparative value (better than, more unjust than, less cowardly than)? To positive and negative value, thin (good, bad) and thick (holy, sublime, pretty, boorish, foolish, cowardice)? To axiological indifference? To the axiological principle of Excluded Fourth (everything is either valuable, disvaluable or indifferent)? To axiological ranking or height (agreeableness is more important than usefulness, the value of knowledge and beauty are equally important)? Müller’s (2019) answers to some of these questions can be gleaned from things he says but they are not answered directly.

Are CAC Justifiable ?

As far as I can tell, Müller (2019) does not tell the reader whether CAC are susceptible of justification or not. One of the central claims of his book is that the intentionality, motivation and justification of one’s emotions is to be understood in terms of their relations to one’s CAC. If they or some of them can be justified, what sort of account would Müller give of awareness of the sorts of thing which justify CAC? Presumably, he would not want to invoke any sort of acquaintance with these things. And the introduction of higher-order CAC would lead to a regress. Perhaps his view is that CAC are not and cannot be susceptible of justification at all. There is perhaps something to be said in favour of the view that no affective states are susceptible of justification. But why allow that some emotions of admiration,

anger or shame are more or less justified and others are unjustified and deny these possibilities to CAC?

It is often thought that many mental acts and states which enjoy the property of intentionality, of being “about something”, are susceptible of justification. On this view, beliefs and judgments, desires and emotions, as well as actions or intentions-in-action are all susceptible of justification. (Acts and states which enjoy intentionality but cannot be justified include knowledge and personal love, memory and visual perception, at least on some views of these). Müller distinguishes two kinds of concern, those which have propositional content and “dispositional states which lack such content” including “basic biological aversions to physical harm” (Müller, 2019, pp. 130–131). Since many types of concern (like the examples mentioned in my first paragraph) enjoy intentionality and are not intrinsically relational, it is difficult to see why these are not susceptible of justification. And the same holds of care and attachments.

Cares and concerns seem to display both affective and conative (will-, desire-, wish-involving) dimensions. Does Müller perhaps think that they are not susceptible of justification because of their conative dimensions? But the case for thinking that desires are susceptible of justification seems to be as strong as the case for holding this view about emotions.

The Origins of CAC

Any account of the relation between CAC and emotions should tell us something about the origins of the former. Müller says little about this matter. But then the same is true of many other influential theories of affective phenomena.

Consider first of all an analogue of the relation between CAC and emotions, the relation between long-standing intentions and actions. Sam’s intention to avoid reading newspapers is a project she has had for years. It informs and is the background to numerous actions by Sam over the years – pushing aside the proffered newspaper, refusing to subscribe to this or that newspaper, turning off when the talk turns to the contents of the morning’s newspaper, rejection of suitors who are newspaper readers. What was the origin of Sam’s project? She formed her intention on December 25, 2010. Her decision or choice marks the formation of her project or intention. Suppose her decision was justified: the papers had all turned into comics, the distinction between facts and comments had become blurred, even intelligent journalists misunderstood “refute”. Suppose, too, that Sam took her decision on the basis of some of these facts. Then the origin of Sam’s project or intention was justified and what justified it continues to justify her project or intention. Similarly, the justifications of her decision are also justifications of the actions mentioned.

If, now, we compare Sam’s project and her attachment to her country, we may wonder whether the right account of the

origin of the latter resembles the origin of the former. Her project began with a decision, just as beliefs often come into being thanks to episodic judgments or discoveries. Did her attachment begin with an emotion? As love sometimes begins with an episode of falling in love? As the attachment to some positive value sometimes goes back to acquaintance with a model, real or fictive, who exemplifies it? As the rejection of some negative value goes back to encounters with a counter-model? More generally, do some attachments begin with emotions or other affective episodes? The question is a large one and could only be answered by looking in some detail at the different types of attachment – to art, to books, to cats, to grandchildren, to a house, a landscape, life. To some values rather than others, to equality rather than freedom, to social justice rather than (the virtue of) justice. But if some attachments do have their origins in emotions and if these emotions are susceptible of justification, a problem arises for Müller's view: Not all emotions can be understood in the ways Müller recommends for emotions generally. The emotion which marks the beginning of an attachment cannot itself be understood in terms of relations between the emotion and the state or disposition to which it gives rise.

A friend of a view like Müller's might respond in different ways to this problem. First, one might deny that attachments always or ever begin with emotion. It is often pointed out that although some loves begin with an episode of falling in love others do not. Second, as already noted, one might argue that some attachments are simply biological phenomena or, more generally, what used to be called drives, and thus lack intentionality and justifiers as well as origins in emotions. Finally, some attachments are loves. (Sam's attachment to her country might be love. It might also merely be an example of a liking). And, as already noted, on one view of love, it is not susceptible of justification. This is the view which takes seriously Shakespeare's claim that "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds" (Sonnet 116). On this view, attachments which are cases of love and which do not begin with emotions neatly avoid the problem mentioned and seem to be able to play something like the roles Müller wants to attribute to them.

It is also true that the view that one type of attachment, perhaps the central type, love, and its opposite, hate, are not susceptible of justification has a consequence which a friend of a view like Müller's might welcome. The consequence concerns a central class of what Müller calls cares and concerns. Many of the cares and concerns we have are concerns and cares we have *because* of our attachments. As Hume and many others have pointed out, love and hate give rise, other things being equal, to cares, concerns, desires and (what are now often called) action-tendencies

concerning the objects of love and hate. If love and hate are not susceptible of justification, what might justify or motivate love/hate-driven cares other than the love or hate itself? In other words, given the assumptions we have made, it seems that we have a class of cares and concerns which could only be justified by attachments.

But the case for thinking that CAC other than love and its consequences are susceptible of justification seems to me to be as strong as the case for thinking that emotions are susceptible of justification. Cares, concerns and attachments, like emotions, are sometimes correct (conclusively or non-defeasibly justified) and sometimes incorrect.

I do incline to Müller's view that long-standing affective and conative states are, in many respects, more fundamental than emotions. This view is that put forward in two of the classic twentieth century books on affectivity, *The Foundations of Character* (1914) by the English psychologist Alexander Shand and *Formalism in Ethics* (1913–1916) by the South German phenomenologist, Max Scheler. Shand argues that what he calls *sentiments* are in many respects prior to what I have here called emotions, and Scheler argues that what he calls *Gesinnungen* (an untranslatable term which, as Scheler uses it, comprehends enduring loves, hates, intentions, preferences and projects but is sharply distinguished from character) share the same property. However, it seems to me that the case for the existence of sentiments and *Gesinnungen* has by no means been fully established and that one way to settle the matter would be to try to answer the question already raised about the birth of CAC. If there really are long-standing CAC, sentiments and *Gesinnungen*, they surely have the following axiological property: they are typically more valuable to their bearers than any emotions. I cannot see how a view like that of Müller could accept this claim.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Kevin Mulligan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8180-6983>

Reference

Müller, J. M. (2019). *The world-directedness of emotional feeling: On affect and intentionality*. Palgrave Macmillan.