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The Emotional Life of Reason: Exploring Conceptions of Objectivity

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Abstract: This paper extends Pinto's (2011) "Emotions and Reasons" (in which he argued that emotions provide reasons for action in so far as the beliefs and desires which make up reasons are constitutive elements of emotions) by exploring relationships between emotions-as-reasons and in (re)conceptualizing objectivity as naturalized to address the evaluative dimension. The paper addresses the emotional character of reason with respect to subjective and normative validity by shifting analysis to socially situated practices.

Keywords: reasoning, emotions, objectivity

1. Introduction

This paper extends Robert C. Pinto's (2011) work, "Emotions and Reasons," in which he argued that emotions can and do provide reasons for action in so far as the beliefs and desires which make up reasons for action are constitutive elements of emotions themselves. This paper takes up the question of the relationship between emotions-as-reasons and developments in the (re)conceptualization of objectivity to address Pinto's (2011) questions about reasonableness, appropriateness, and validity. In this paper, we are concerned with Pinto's (2011) exploration of the interplay between emotions and reasons—but not with emotional arguments, or nor the role of emotion in argumentation.¹

Pinto (2011) described widespread agreement that emotions contain cognitive and evaluative elements, and that those evaluations are not mere "triggers" of emotional states, but rather are an ingredient to—and constitutive of—the emotional states themselves. Aristotle (1941) made it clear that desirings or evaluative attitudes that anchor human action are shaped by "a moral state" and/or character in *Nichomachean Ethics, Book II*. Emotions have been classified as primary (anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise and disgust) and social (sympathy, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, indignation and contempt) (Damasio 2003), and are regarded as distinct from bodily appetites (e.g., hunger,

¹ While we are not addressing this issue, a brief overview is warranted as the role of emotions in argument represents an area for future investigation. In argumentation, emotions are commonly viewed as the objects of appeals, with a function as adjuvants (e.g., appeals to pity, fear, shame, etc. used to enhance the cogency of an argument bearing on something else) (Micheli 2010). Normative approaches to argumentation are prone to viewing emotional appeals as illegitimate substitutes for argument, including the view that they are fallacies of relevance (Micheli 2010). Micheli challenged this on the premise that "emotional appeals may very well be argumentative, in the sense that a speaker may put forward a set of claims which seek to justify the legitimacy of her emotion and offer reasons why it should be felt" (Micheli 2010, p. 10).

thirst) and moods (e.g., agitation, depression) (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996). From a biological perspective, emotions can be viewed as evolutionary chemical and neural responses to external stimuli, resulting in an active state of adaptive behavior for survival (e.g., fear in response to danger response can serve a protective function) (Damasio 2003).

Beyond the biological perspective, emotions mark the salience of objects, modulating significance and meaning in individual judgment (Nussbaum 2001). In this view, emotions have intentional objects, and those intentional objects give rise to a set of beliefs and judgments *shaped in cognition* which justify the given emotion through "cognitive antecedents" (Micheli 2010, p. 7). For instance, certain beliefs and judgments must be entertained in order to feel pity: another person's misfortune must be judged as undeserved; and the belief that such a misfortune could fall on the person feeling pity (or their relatives) (Micheli 2010, p. 7). Similarly, grief is based on the antecedent belief that a person suffered a profound loss (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996). The beliefs just described are necessary constituent parts of emotion: the emotion would not exist without them (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996).

Pinto (2011) argued that actions flow from *conative* attitudes (such as intentions), the reasons for which lie in a combination of cognitive (doxastic or belief-like) attitudes, on the one hand, and evaluative attitudes, on the other. Based on that, Pinto (2011) argued that emotions can *supply reasons* for action in two distinct ways. First, a belief that a person is in the grip of a certain emotion can give another person a reason for acting in a certain way. A may shun B because she knows that B is angry, and shunning B will avoid an unpleasant and potentially destructive interchange. Another example from Gilbert (1997) is: A cites the fact that he loves B as a reason for B to marry him. In this sort of case, it is an emotion that constitutes (at least part of) a reason for action.

Second, the beliefs and evaluative attitudes which are ingredient to a person's emotion can constitute a reason—or the core of a reason—for that person to act in a certain way. For example, A's fear of an approaching train contains beliefs and evaluative attitudes that gives A a reason to get off the train tracks immediately.

To extend Pinto's (2011) work, this paper addresses the emotional character of reason with respect to subjective and normative validity. Pinto (2011) acknowledged Nussbaum's insistence that the valuings ingredient to emotions reflect—at least for the most part—personal valuings whose validity need not depend on their being valid for others. However, Pinto (2011) emphasized the need for emotions to be *reasonable* and *appropriate to their objects*, which can be normatively valid or invalid. From this perspective, conventional modes of objectivity are insufficient to judge the validity of emotions in reasoning. To address that, we consider how more robust accounts of objectivity might address the question of validity, and propose processes that have the potential to better assess emotions in the context of reasoning.

2. Overcoming binaries and dichotomies

The fact that human beings are as much feeling creatures as they are thinking creatures constitutes a subjective constraint upon objectivity for knowledge in general. (Code 1981, p. 275)

In this section, we problematize binaries that position emotion and reason as mutually exclusive. Boler (1997) descried the marginalization of emotions as the opposite of reason or rationality. Some (such as Kant) are unsympathetic to emotions, viewing them as an unreliable hindrance to

objective truth and an interference to rational thinking (Boler 1997; Bondi 2007; Janack 2002; Laslett 1990); others (such as Hume) recognize that emotion is vital to a sense of morality (Boler 1997). Boler (1997) described how feminist attempts to elevate emotions from their discounted, "irrational" status tend to replicate misleading binary oppositions. Such dualisms are part of a legacy of rationality and its myriad of historical versions that continue to dominate (Boler 1997).

Boler (1997) is concerned with how judgements about emotions oppress the knower in the context of "common sense knowledge of the everyday world" (p. 209). When emotions are viewed as purely irrational (i.e., as contrary to common sense and logic) and cloaked in discourses of pathology (Boler 1997, p. 209),² they are marginalized. Kahan and Nussbaum (1996) describe a persistent narrow, "mechanistic" view that defines emotions as energies that drive a person—despite widespread academic agreement about the conative aspects of emotion. A claim that somehow emotions are necessarily "bound up with thoughts that are confused, unreliable, or sub-par" (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996, p. 292) is therefore wrong-headed because it fails to acknowledge those conative components. If we accept the view of emotions as conative, the language of rationality is an "impoverished, if not inadequate, way to assess emotions" (Boler 1997, p. 223).

The illusion that emotions are absent from various forms of reasoning persists. Correspondence to "objective reality is not possible in any domain: knowledge production – and representation – is always creative and contestable rather than neutral and reliable" (Bondi et al. 2007, p. 11). While emotions come into play as reasons across contexts, they are often rationalized away when sufficient other reasons or evidence appear to support the emotional response without acknowledging it (Neilsen 1999).³ For example, as an educational researcher, L feels anger about injustices she perceives in certain school practices (and those practices might appear just to some, and unjust to others, depending on their social positions). That anger is the reason for L's decision to research those practices. In a research proposal, L would identify other compelling evidence to persuade a funding agency to support the research—but would not specifically name her anger as a reason or justification if she follows disciplinary conventions. This example highlights how academic work might be rooted in emotional bases and "passions," "but traditional academic genres seek to exclude [emotions'] explicit expression" (Bondi et al. 2007, p. 11). Likewise, L's decision reflects Nelson's (1996) observation that emotion plays a role in deciding what to research, how to research it, and how to draw conclusions. However, acknowledging those emotional bases are rarely (if ever) acknowledged and suppressed (Howes, 2015) due to the perception that they contaminate otherwise "objective" acts of reason. Likewise, Howes (2012) provided an account of the role of emotions in influencing what scientific researchers find interesting in which she pointed out that emotions play a role in judging saliency: "We may feel less able to cope intellectually when we feel negatively about a subject or about ourselves in relation to that subject. But interest can also motivate us in such situations: it

² Boler's (1997) explication of various discursive frames for emotion (rational, pathological, romantic, political) and corresponding metaphors offers a useful framework for understanding ways in which emotions are handled in popular and academic discursive circles.

³ In Neilsen's (1999) examples, beliefs sometimes shape (and/or bias) evidence included to support the conclusion. This is consistent with political science research about *cultural cognition*, the phenomenon by which people are more likely to accept evidence when it conforms to their self-defining values (e.g., Kahan & Braham 2006). While cultural cognition focuses on the construct of "values," we believe that those values are closely tied to—and sometimes rooted in—emotion. Further exploration of these connections is warranted, but beyond the scope of this short paper.

encourages intellectual perseverance, courage, and thoroughness" (Howes 2012, p. 741).⁴ Following Nelson (1996) and Howes (2012), Bondi (2007) argues that academic work (in general) could be enriched and strengthened if emotions were openly acknowledged, taken more seriously, and placed less peripherally in academic pursuits. She suggests achieving this end through a heightened, reflexive awareness of researchers' emotions that takes underlying epistemologies of knowledge production into account.

This is not to say that emotions necessarily supply good reasons in all cases. Pinto (2011) raised the issue of distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable emotional responses. He explained,

Sometimes we judge a person's anger as unreasonable because it *isn't reasonable* for that person to hold one of the beliefs which ground his or her anger. But at other times we judge anger *unreasonable* because we think there is something wrong with the evaluative attitude from which it springs. (Pinto 2011, p. 11)

For example, a person who feels extreme anger would judge the subjective validity of the emotion when deciding whether that anger is *reasonable* to express, and if it is *appropriate to* its object. The emotion itself contains an appraisal of a situation—but the angry person's actions are determined by a more complex interplay of judgements (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996). The perspectives of others would represent judgments of normative validity on the reasonableness and appropriateness of the emotion as a reason. For example, rulings on manslaughter versus premeditated murder routinely take emotions-as-reasons into account (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996) and apply normative validity standards. Reduced punishment for a person who kills their partner in the heat of anger for being cuckolded is common—and this decision is made on the grounds that the killer's *appropriate* anger morally distinguishes her from others who kill *without* similar (and appropriate) passions (Kahan & Nussbaum 1996). A ruling of manslaughter does **not** justify murder as morally appropriate—but takes into account the normative validity of the emotion behind the action as a reason for that action.

Similarly, we provided an example earlier of the reasonable and appropriate use of fear (of an oncoming train) as a reasonable and appropriate reason for an action (getting off of the train tracks immediately). However, fear can be unreasonable or inappropriate depending on the context. Consider that A fears heights—that fear is a reasonable and appropriate basis for the decision to exit a 3rd-floor balcony with no railing (because the risk of injury is present). But that same fear in the same knower, A, is unreasonable if that fear causes her to refuse to climb a two-foot-tall step ladder where the risk of injury is negligible at best.

The remainder of this paper will explore how to address methods and criteria that would result in judgements about the validity of emotions as reasons. For this paper, we share Baumtrog's position that speaking in terms of "reasonableness" over "rationality" overcomes the absence of moral considerations crucial to reasonableness that are, according to Baumtrog (2014), often absent in discussion of rationality. Broadly, we take up an epistemic evidentialist notion of reasonableness (Pinto 2001; Pinto 2006) according to which, "if we can deal with the threat of an infinite regress of reasons, we might equate its being reasonable to adopt an attitude A toward a propositional content with having a good reason all things considered to adopt that attitude" (Pinto 2013). This approach also allows for certain inconsistencies in reasoning that

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⁴ We take up Howes' (2012, 2015) position concerning emotion in the context of intellectual virtue in greater detail later in this paper.

may not be deemed rational but which can be still allow an attribution of reasonableness (Pinto 2001; Baumtrog 2014). Thus, judging emotions as *reasonable* and *appropriate to* their object (Pinto 2011) requires a untraditional evaluative approach. To explore this, we situate our work in robust accounts of objectivity⁵ that transcend the rational binaries we just critiqued.

3. Contested terrains of objectivity

Objectivity is a historically situated concept, as well as an ideal "shaped by scientific pressures rather than high philosophical theory" (Kulka 2008, p. 290). Early conceptions of objectivity can be traced to 18th century "truths of nature," succeeded by 19th century "mechanical objectivity," and finally 20th century "trained judgements." All three of these early objectivity paradigms attempt to assure "value-free analysis" and "arms-length detachment" in opposition to undesirable "subjectivity, political concern, verbal and informal analysis, and explanations of particular phenomena, all of which are assumed to be less than scientific" (Nelson 1996, p. 22). Each contains a set of norms for epistemic and representational accountability (Daston & Galison 2007 in Kulka 2008). Their evolution calls attention to "vexed and changing attitudes" toward representations of objectivity (Kulka 2008, p. 292)—though despite their differences, they share a commitment to neutrality by attempting to remove subjectivity or constrain the subject (Kulka 2008).

The predominant view that emotional involvement with subject matter compromises objectivity remains in contemporary, dominant conceptions of objectivity. Haraway (1991) rejects this "fetish for scientific objectivity" (p. 23) on the grounds that the promise of objectivity falls short when the knower seeks the subject position of objectivity grounded in so-called neutrality (and not identity). Nelson (1999) cautions that the "objectivity/subjectivity dualism" is a false construct, challenged by feminist claims that objectivity must be redefined to acknowledge the social construction of knowledge: researchers are social beings whose subjectivity is reflected in their work. Yet, dominant conceptions of objectivity are culturally constructed in ways that that position "detachment" (from the subject, researchers, and so on) as the ideal (Denbow 2014; Nelson 1996), and perpetuate the belief that objectivity is only acquired through distance (Denbow 2014).

To address the shortcomings of conventional accounts of objectivity, we explore three alternative conceptions: strong objectivity, embodied objectivity, and naturalistic objectivity. All three challenge the intellect-versus-emotions and self-versus-other binaries (Halpin 1989) that underpin mechanical and trained judgment paradigms. In doing so, the alternative conceptions of objectivity do not take the form of radical relativism or subjectivism—rather, they represent "a quest for reliable knowledge that recognizes the role of the knower and that of the context of investigation" (Nelson 1996, p. xii) and reject the (false) ideal of neutrality. That broader context is necessary for better understanding and judging emotions as reasons.

⁵ Many of the challenges to conventional objectivity—and the accounts we present here—arise out of feminist scholarship. The scope of this short paper prevents us from engaging in full discussion of the gendered nature of binary positions, nor to offer a detailed historical perspective of the reasons for and contributions of feminist scholarship on this issue. However, we acknowledge that an important aspect of the social construction of all forms of objectivity have roots in gender oppression. We also acknowledge that the limited context offered here is at odds with the emphasis on context and perspective for which we advocate.

Harding's (1992a, b, 1995) *strong objectivity* is a response to her rejection of the "neutrality ideal" which she characterizes as lacking sufficient rigour,⁶ and is grounded in standpoint epistemology. She argues that when neutrality is abandoned, objectivity remains, but is based on fairness and honesty. The resulting socially situated grounds generate stronger standards for objectivity (Harding 1992). Strong objectivity, she explains, is not based on an illusion of detachment—instead, it is based on recognition of individual attachments and the partiality that they lend to a person's views.

Practising strong objectivity requires knowers to reflect on their social situatedness with respect their position, perspectives, and power. To avoid subjectivism, those attachments and their partiality are exposed by comparison and dialog among multiple and divergent views within an open community (Nelson 1996, p. 48). Knowers ought to pursue a logic of discovery that entails consideration of conflicting viewpoints, especially those of marginalized groups (but without naively assuming those viewpoints) in order to obtain more objective accounts of the world. In Harding's view, this would lead to "less false" and more objective accounts of the world.

Arriving at strong objectivity in this manner requires active and engaged inquiry through communication and collaboration with others. Salmon and Bassett (2009) emphasize that it is "much more than an exercise in imagination" (p. 914) because it requires asking, observing and critically reflecting on the positions of others. This would be appropriate for evaluating emotions used as reasons, since it would necessarily cause the knower to actively engage in dialog and reflection to arrive at an objective valuation of her reasons.

Haraway's (1991) *embodied objectivity*, like Harding's strong objectivity, concerns itself with situated knowledges in which the object of knowledge is the knower, not an external entity. Haraway's embodied objectivity is a critique of how dominant conceptions of objectivity define what counts as knowledge. She explains that embodied objectivity depends upon "a power-charged social relation of 'conversation,'" not an individualized "logic of discovery" (Haraway 1991, p. 198). However, she acknowledges the impossibility of being simultaneously aware of or "in" all privileged and subjugated positions structured by gender, race, nation, class, etc. However, that "conversation," if it involves representatives from varied social positions, opens up the possibility to transcend the problem of false neutrality since the collectivity provides a basis for normative judgments of validity.

In addition to strong objectivity and embodied objectivity, *naturalisitc objectivity* also holds epistemic promise to overcome the shortcomings of conventional accounts (Barad 2003; Daston & Galison 2007; Kulka 2008; White 2010). Like strong and embodied objectivity, naturalistic objectivity also acknowledges interconnectedness: "the 'knower' does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world—there is no such exterior observational point" (Barad, 2014, p. 828). However, naturalized objectivity departs from strong and embodied objectivity in its emphasis on performance in the natural world – not just in relation to others' standpoints.

Analysis shifts to concrete activities performed in the natural world, constituting *performative*⁷ rather than abstract or theoretical studies of objectivity (Barad 2003; Kulka 2008).

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⁶ Individual and collective social positions set limits on what the individual can know; "some social situations—critically unexamined dominant ones—are more limiting than others in this respect; and what makes these situations more limiting is their inability to generate the most critical questions about received belief" (Harding 1992b, p. 443).

⁷ Performativity is "a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of

In other words, "one becomes objective by performing objective acts," instead of the imposition of representationalist⁸ (external, abstract) norms (Daston & Galison 2007, p. 52). Thinking about reasoning as performative "shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/ doings/ actions" (Barad 2003, p. 802) where reasoning is viewed as "a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms" (Butler 1993, p. 12 in Ruitenberg 2007, p. 263). This view recognizes that reasoning contains a series of performative expectations (e.g., ways to reason correctly, and certain standards and criteria that make up its performative aspect). Thus it is not exclusively the person reasoning who performs the act, but rather, the person reasoning is performatively produced by the powerful discourse of repeated reasoning practice in which she participates. Performative practices of objectivity are therefore *natural* activities performed by *natural* beings in the *natural* world (Barad 2014; Kulka 2008).

Focusing on the performative idiom does not mean doing away with discipline-specific representational aspects of objectivity (whether science, informal logic, or something else) (Pickering, 1994). Rather, performative reasoning includes the concerns of the representational idiom among broader concerns—thus giving it the potential to address the very real "emotional economy" (White 2010, p. 826) of academic pursuits alongside disciplinary conventions.

We argued that emotions play an important role in reasoning and as reasons in the natural world. We presented three alternative accounts of objectivity that we believe to be suitable to serve as a basis for judging subjective and normative validity of emotions as reasons. In the next section, we take up processes that might be appropriate to achieving those judgements that are consistent with these accounts of objectivity just presented.

4. Practising intellectual virtue through reflexivity and interpretive community as a path to objectivity and validity

Howes (2015, p. 173) argues that objectivity requires intellectual virtue, "an enduring commitment to salient and accurate information about reality." In this view, the objective reasoner can be trusted to manage perspectives, beliefs, emotions, biases and responses in an intellectually virtuous manner. We agree with Howes' (2015), and believe her position to be consistent with the view that the conceptions of objectivity suitable to judging emotions must address the situated nature of that reality.

Howes (2015) argues that promoting diverse epistemic communities is a necessary requirement to achieve an adequate account of objectivity. She even goes so far as to say that community intellectual virtue is necessary for the development of personal objectivity. All three accounts of objectivity we described earlier (strong, embodied, naturalistic) call for reflective,

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can be traced to British philosopher J. L. Austin with respect to speech acts, to which Derrida added poststructuralist amendments (Barad 2003; Ruitenberg 2007, 2015). Judith Butler's subsequent extension of Derrida's work added Foucaultian theory of the productive effects of regulatory power in performative identity, and focused on gender performativity in which she conventionalized gender as "doing" or repeated action (Barad 2003; Ruitenberg 2015).

⁸ Pickering (1994) defined the representational idiom as the traditional scientific idiom situated in positivism whose defining characteristic is its production of representations of nature, facts and theories. He contrasted this with the performative idiom, which recognizes the material and social dimensions of science, and attempts to bring representation and performativity into simultaneous focus. In Pickering's (1994) view, the performative idiom rebalances science by including human agency in knowledge production. Barad (2003, p. 806) argues that "Representationalism is so deeply entrenched within Western culture that it has taken on a commonsense appeal"—and that the performative idiom challenges that entrenchment.

collaborative and dialogical processes in order to judge validity of claims and reasons, which could be achieved through epistemic communities. Through dialog, epistemic community members become sources of normative validity – for instance, dialog can address Harding's emphasis on avoiding subjectivism through comparison and consideration of conflicting viewpoints. Certainly, a condition consistent with strong and embodied objectivity would be the representation of diverse (and marginalized) social positions and perspectives within those epistemic communities.

Effective epistemic communities would require communicative competence such that "success and mutual understanding are achieved inter-subjectively" (de Vera 2014, p. 157). This could pose a challenge to some disciplinary areas in which those perspectives are not already included or might be contrary to the community's agenda. Hanson (1992) observes that the legal field has historically been unable or unwilling to accommodate diversity. She explains that a central tenet of feminist jurisprudence "is the idea that the systematic oppression of women is perpetuated by a characterization of legal rules as objective or neutral" (Hanson 1992, p. 367), making challenges to normative validity difficult when the epistemic community is unaware of its perspectives and unwilling to be "self-reflective about [its own disciplinary] knowledge and its production" (Denbow 2014, p. 29). Similarly, public forums aimed at democratic dialog have (for the most part) lacked adequate structures and norms for inclusion and communicative styles (Pinto 2012) - though Goi's (2005) research offers a promising approach to overcome this through structured agonistic issue forums designed to deal with emotionally-charged topics. An added advantage of epistemic communities in forums like those Goi (2005) describes offers the potential to not only address divergent perspectives, but to allow objectivity to be discussed and validity to be established through the practice of naturalized reasoning in the natural world, thereby incorporating the performative idiom.

In addition to inter-subjective processes in epistemic communities, strong, embodied and naturalistic objectivity emphasize the need for reflexivity. While this can be achieved in many ways, Reger (2001) recommends "talking back" about emotions by explicitly identifying and valuing research-induced emotions through reflexive consideration. For example, in the context of academic work, individual researchers might document, investigate and analyze their emotions alongside other evidence and reasons (thus integrating both). In doing so, those researchers use reflexivity to combine subjectivity and (conventional modes of) analytic rigor (Reger 2001). Reger's (2001) recommendation reflects the performance of reasoning within representationalist conventions, consistent with naturalized objectivity. This would also address Howes' (2015) views about balance in intellectual virtue because reflexivity in Reger's (2001) form requires the knower to distinguish between having an emotion, and acting in accordance with that emotion.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we reiterated what Pinto (2011) believed to be widespread agreement that emotions contain cognitive and evaluative elements, and those are ingredient to—and constitutive of—emotional states. We offered a critique of false binaries that separate emotion and reason as dichotomous, and argued that emotions are not necessary "irrational" or contrary to reason.

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⁹ Hanson (1992) challenges the Dworkinian requirement of fit on the grounds that "a supposedly neutral criterion which does not comprehend its own perspectivity – namely, the gender-biased perspective which is inherent in the *status quo*" (p. 370).

Indeed, emotions have and do play into research practice and non-clinical situations as (unacknowledged) reasons. We then summarized three alternative conceptions of objectivity in order to propose the use of richer, stronger notions of objectivity suitable to evaluate the reasonableness and appropriateness of emotions when they are used as reasons.

The richer views of objectivity offered by strong, embodied and naturalized accounts shift the analysis of objectivity to reflexive and socially situated practices which tease out their internal standards. Objectivity exists, but in the absence of neutrality. Accepting naturalistic objectivity alongside more traditional forms (as described by Daston & Galison 2007) might better address the emotional character of reason (Pinto 2011; White 2009) with respect to the subjective and normative validity of emotions that Pinto (2011) identified. We then proposed ways in which reflexivity and interpretive community hold promise to achieve intellectual virtue. Together, those processes and the goal of intellectual virtue in judging emotions offer a potentially more robust appreciation of the important role that emotions can play in reasoning without reducing validity to subjectivity.

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