

The Ineffable as Radical

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Abstract Ronald de Sousa is one of the few analytic philosophers to have explored the ineffability of emotion. Ineffability arises, for de Sousa, from attempts to translate experience, which involves non-conceptual content, into language, which involves conceptual content. As de Sousa himself rightly notes, such a characterization construes all perceptual experience as ineffable and does not explain what might set emotional ineffability apart. I build on de Sousa's insights regarding what makes emotional ineffability distinctive by highlighting that in the case of emotion the content in question is, crucially, evaluative. Evaluative content has normativity that makes the ineffability of emotion both particularly salient as well as particularly relevant, as the way in which an object is valuable is felt to be merited despite the experience's ineffability. After proposing an improved working definition of emotional ineffability, I move to the question of how language and emotional experience interact, and whether these interactions can be evaluated in any systematic way. While de Sousa is pessimistic regarding the prospects of such an evaluation, I argue that if we move beyond an individual level of analysis it is possible to characterize cases where the ineffability of emotion leaves members of particular social groups vulnerable to a range of epistemic and affective injustices. I argue that we can similarly characterize cases where the ineffability of emotion holds radical potential to challenge and transform unjust social arrangements. I end by proposing that the representational content of emotion involves what I call 'modal complexity' and that this makes emotions particularly well-suited to play such radical roles.

‘Não sei qual é o sentimento
Que me desvia do caminho,
Que me dá de repente
Um nojo daquilo que seguia,
Uma vontade de nunca chegar a casa,
Um desejo de indefinido,
Um desejo lúcido de indefinido.’

-Fernando Pessoa 1944 Obra Inédita

‘I don’t know what feeling it is
That diverts me from the path,
That gives me a sudden
Disgust for what I followed,
A want to never arrive home,
A desire for the undefined
A lucid desire for the undefined’

-Fernando Pessoa 1944 Unpublished Work

1. Introduction

When we say something is ineffable we typically mean that it cannot easily be put into words. Our emotional life is often ineffable in this sense. Ronald de Sousa is one of the few analytic philosophers to have tackled the ineffability of emotion (de Sousa 2011; 2012).¹ One might wonder whether such a project is even possible to undertake. For if the object of our inquiry is the ineffability of emotion, and our investigation must proceed within the confines of what is linguistically expressible, then it seems that we must choose between either remaining silent on the topic or speaking nonsense. In other words, if ‘ineffable’ is a predicate it seems it cannot be predicated of anything without incurring

¹ A recent article by Tietjen and Furtak (2021) broaches ineffability in the case of loneliness in particular. Ineffable experience has been perhaps most extensively discussed in work on religious and mystic experience (Alston 1956). It has also been discussed in philosophical work on trauma (Brison 2001).

contradiction.² I follow others in taking such a line to be unduly pessimistic.³ In so far as we are concerned with the ineffability of an experience, in this case of emotional experience, we do not lack a referent. As de Sousa (2011) rightly notes, the fact that that which is ineffable exceeds language does not preclude our ability to refer to it. The ineffability of emotion then can be coherently spoken of. I attempt to do so in what follows.

Throughout, I will restrict my discussion to occurrent emotional episodes with intentional content, thereby setting aside moods, dispositions and emotions that might lack intentional objects. I begin by introducing the concept of ineffability as it applies to emotion, building on de Sousa's work. I will propose a slight but crucial modification to his view that ineffability amounts to attempts to translate across different kinds of representational format. As the view stands, it makes all experiences, perceptual, affective and otherwise, similarly ineffable. The importance of ineffability in emotion then is not fully brought out. I take steps towards remedying this by highlighting the evaluative nature of emotional content, and its associated normativity, as key. I then address a question de Sousa sets himself, regarding whether the interactions between language and emotion can be evaluated in any systematic way. We will see that de Sousa offers a negative answer, claiming that whether a particular interaction between language and emotion is positive or negative depends on which axis of value we have in mind (for example: instrumental value, morality or fittingness), as well as on the individual in question, their life history and temperamental particularities. Given this complexity, de Sousa takes there to be no systematic way of determining when the effects of language on emotion (and vice versa) should be evaluated as positive or negative.

In this chapter I argue that once we move beyond an individual level of analysis, it becomes possible to provide at least an important portion of such an evaluation. I characterize a set of cases where the effect of language on emotion is systematically negative in a moral sense. These are the set of cases where the ineffability of emotions leaves individuals vulnerable to a number of epistemic and affective injustices. After illustrating what such cases involve I move on to outline cases in which the reverse interaction, the effect of emotion on language, can be systematically evaluated as positive in moral and political senses. These are cases where the ineffability of emotions holds

² See Alston (1956) for a classic statement of this view.

³ See Zwicky (2012) and Srinivasan (2018b)

radical potential, that is, where the ineffability of emotions has the potential to promote political critique and progress. Ineffability then, is at the same time vulnerability and potential. I end by sketching a proposal regarding the nature of the representational content of emotions that may help explain both why it is emotional experiences, rather than perceptual or other types of experience that we tend to characterize as ineffable, as well as why these experiences have such radical potential. This is the proposal that emotions have modally complex representational contents. This content in some sense puts us in contact with undefined alternative possibilities.

2. The Ineffable in Emotion

What is it for something to be ineffable? At first gloss, the ineffable is that which exceeds language, but what exactly does this mean? We might start, as de Sousa does, by highlighting what it does *not* mean. We have seen that to be ineffable is not to lack a referent. There is something that we attribute the property of ineffability, and therefore to which we can refer. Neither, arguably, is the ineffable that which is inexpressible *tout court*, for there might be other ways of expressing oneself besides language. Crying, whistling and jumping can all be expressive of specific emotional states for example. Similarly, painting, dance and other artistic modes may be expressive. Ineffability then has to do with that we, in some sense, cannot adequately put into words, rather than that which we cannot express at all.

A weak sense of ineffability would involve a specific language lacking relevant concepts with which to describe an experience. This sense of ineffability is, I think, uncontroversial, given the various emotion terms we have come to learn from languages other than English (for example: *Saudade*, from Portuguese, meaning a profound melancholic longing for something or someone that one cares or cared for; *Gigil*, from Filipino, meaning an overwhelming urge to squeeze or pinch something cute; *Schadenfreude*, from German, meaning the pleasure associated with seeing a ‘bad’ person being harmed or receiving retribution). Despite being uncontroversial, even this weak sense of ineffability raises difficult questions such as whether these emotion terms are untranslatable. One reason to think that translation might never be complete is that the relationship between experience and language is complex. Our manner of conceptualizing affective experience can influence the very shape and form our experience takes (Ahmed 2013; Barrett 2017; Munch-Juriscic 2021; Russell 2003). If this is the case, it might not

just be that translations of emotion concepts will be difficult, but that the very experience to which the concept is applied itself differs depending on the emoters' culture and epoch. While such concerns are related to the weak conception of ineffability, there is a stronger construal that is our target concept. Strong ineffability is the claim that certain aspects of experience surpass conceptualization itself, regardless of specific language. Here we might ask whether by this we mean that currently, at this moment in time, an experience is hard to describe, or whether we mean that a certain experience will forever be so. These are questions I cannot settle here. In either case, most would agree that words can do better or worse jobs at describing experiences such that ineffable experience can be spoken of to better or worse extents. The weak and the strong conception of ineffability are then very much related, for some languages might do a better job at describing certain experiences than others, including by boasting emotion terms other languages lack.

Even when we have an adequate emotion term however, we might think there is a sense in which emotional experience can be ineffable. Experiences are often felt to contain more information than our emotional concepts can convey. This is because concepts are generalizations made over particulars with common features. Concepts typically capture these common, or prototypical, features while leaving out the particularities displayed by tokens within each type.⁴ The information contained in experience then seems to be more fine-grained than the concepts with which we can express them. This has led many to postulate that emotional experience involves non-conceptual content that is richer than the conceptual content at play in language (Tappolet 2020; Döring 2007; de Sousa 2011).⁵ The ineffability of emotion, de Sousa proposes, likely lies in attempts to translate across these different types of representation. It is the information lost in translating non-conceptual content into conceptual content that is ineffable.

The proposal can be summarized as:

The ineffability of experience involves attempting to translate non-conceptual experience, an analogue system of representation, into language, a digital system of representation. (de Sousa 2011)

⁴ See Rosch (1983) on the prototype theory of concepts.

⁵ On this de Sousa (2011) advises us not to be too quick to assume that non-conceptual content always represents more information than conceptual content, for even if experience has a higher informational capacity than relevant concepts, in quantitative terms, concepts allow one 'astronomical' capacities for representation, not least because they allow the expression of negation, counterfactuals and hypotheticals.

Non-conceptual content is thought to be analogue, while conceptual content is, in contrast, often characterized as digital (Gauker 2017; Bermúdez 2007; Maley 2011). How exactly to characterize the difference between analogue and digital content is a subject of debate, but there are some illustrative differences that can guide us. First, while conceptual content represents an object to have a particular property, analogue content always includes further information about the object. The belief that a dog is dangerous for example, attributes the property of danger to the dog. The same concept is employed no matter whether the danger is great or minor, whether the dog is familiar or unfamiliar, or whether one has a good chance of evading its threat. An emotion of fear felt towards the same dog represents the particular degree and type of danger by plausibly representing aspects about the novelty of the situation, its severity and one's capacity to cope with the threat. Emotional experience involves analog representations as it contains extra information compared to digital representations.

Analog representations are also thought to be 'continuous' as they vary systematically, or smoothly, with what is being represented. Intense fear and mild apprehension will be two points, so to speak, on opposite ends a continuum of danger representations that have a number of intermediary emotional states between them. These representations will vary continuously, in line with the relevant degree of danger perceived by the agent. Similarly, between two emotions of different types, say fear and sadness, there will plausibly be a number of intermediary affective states that lie somewhere in between the two and correlate systematically with the agent's situation. Concepts, on the other hand, vary in what might be described as a step-wise manner: differences of degree within a given concept are not represented and there are gaps between concepts as the change from one concept to another is not gradual. The belief that the dog is dangerous for example uses the same concept as does the belief that the lion is dangerous. Different degrees of danger are not represented by the same concept. Similarly, we do not readily find a series of concepts that could fill the gap between two evaluative concepts, of say danger and loss. The idea then is that ineffability lies in attempts to translate what is represented in analogue format in experience into the digital format of language. All that is lost in this translation is what remains ineffable.

The worry with this understanding of ineffability is that it seems to apply to all non-conceptual representations that we attempt to put into words. As de Sousa (2011) rightly

notes, on such a reading, all perceptual experiences are ineffable. As perceptual experiences are thought to involve non-conceptual content, all information that is lost when putting a perceptual experience into words will remain ineffable. For example, in the case of vision, our ability to visually discriminate different shades of colour is thought to surpass our colour concepts, such that in describing a scene our concepts will underspecify particular shades of colour that we experience. All perceptual experience seems to be ineffable in this sense: information is lost when moving from experience to words. We should be pressed to say something further about emotional ineffability however, given that it is typically affective experiences that strike agents as ineffable. Emotional ineffability seems to be more salient and more relevant to us than perceptual ineffability and the proposed conception of ineffability (as mere translation from analogue to digital contents) does not tell us why this would be the case.

The answer seems to lie in the fact that emotional experience is evaluative: it is experience that is felt to be not only meaningful but merited. Here I will be assuming a liberal perceptualist view of emotions,⁶ in that emotions represent evaluative properties, but it will crucially be the disanalogies between perception and emotion that allow us to make sense of the ineffability of emotion as particularly relevant. First, as (in some sense) perceptions of value, emotional experience will naturally strike the agent as more significant than common perception, making any ineffability more salient. Ineffable evaluative experience involves indescribable valuables, rather than indescribable objects of any other sort. For the most part, the ineffable in perceptual experiences will not be salient or particularly relevant to the agent. The exact shade of red that one represents one's carpet as being is not relevant to how one will engage with it or think of it, for most intents and purposes, the concept 'red' does just fine. This is not to deny that important perceptual experiences can be hard to express. A smell or a sound may be hard to describe and involve specific fine-grained types of threat (burning smells vs toxic chemical smells vs rotting smells; sounds of a tree falling vs of a large animal approaching vs distressed cries). The aspects of these experiences that are hard to describe are not, typically, that relevant to the agent however, for she can be motivated to take the actions appropriate to

⁶ For perceptualist views of emotion see Tappolet (2016), Döring (2007), Prinz (2006), for critique see Deonna and Teroni (2012), Brady (2013). Here I am endorsing a liberal perceptualist view in that I am assuming that emotions represent evaluative properties in the same format as perceptual experiences are thought to represent objects and their properties, that is, non-conceptually. I remain agnostic on whether further analogies with perception hold.

the specific type of threat while lacking the words to describe the experience. The importance of perceptual experiences can typically be successfully acted upon, as well as communicated to others, while lacking capacities to describe the experience itself. In other words, one's conceptual repertoire is typically sufficient to engage with the import of perceptual experiences.

In ineffable emotional experience this is often not the case, as the very sense in which the experience holds import is hard to conceptualize and communicate. As a consequence, the agent's attention is drawn to this ineffability and one seeks to resolve it.⁷ This is most clearly at play in complex emotional experiences that do not have clear behavioural outputs such as for example nostalgia and aesthetic emotions. These types of emotion are notoriously hard to put into words and the reasons for which they are felt can themselves be complex and resistant to verbal expression. Despite complex emotions being the prototype of ineffable emotional experiences, I believe that so called 'garden variety' emotions are also often experienced as ineffable. When experiencing anger, fear or guilt for example, it might not be entirely clear to oneself which emotional state one is in, nor exactly why one feels the way one does, much less how one should act in response.

Another reason the ineffability of emotion may be more salient than that of perception is that perceptual experiences are easier to share than emotional experiences. In lack of words, one can often call on others to 'look!' 'smell!' or 'listen!', so long as the object of one's perceptual experience is present. It is much harder to call on other agents to 'feel!' in response to a common state of affairs, such that sharing a relevant affective experience can require more conceptual and communicative work. This is related to an oft noted disanalogy between emotion and perception: that emotions have reasons while perceptions do not (see Deonna and Teroni 2012 for example).⁸ While perceptual experiences have causes, which are generally speaking causally efficacious at bringing about the relevant experience irrespective of the agent in question, emotions have reasons that count in favour of affective states in a manner far more dependent on the agent's sensibilities, history and mood. Experiences of the affective kind will then be less commonly shared, as well as harder to share, than ordinary cases of perceptual experience. In the case of emotions, being able to adequately conceptualize the

⁷ This is in line with observations made regarding the relevance of affective ineffability in the philosophy of religion literature (James 2008; Wildman 2018).

⁸ There are some who take perception to have reasons as well (see Siegel 2017) but this is by no means a mainstream view.

experience, so as to describe it and attempt to provide the relevant reasons to an interlocutor, will be more critical than in the case of perceptual experience.

The normativity of emotional experience is key to the relevance of its ineffability, then. Emotional experiences are felt to be warranted, or justified, as that which is valuable for agents is valuable for reasons. When we are angry, for example, we feel that construing the remark as an offense is merited. The ineffable in emotional experience does not escape this: although it may be hard to describe, it is felt to be apt. An emotional experience that is hard to conceptualize and describe may still feel just as warranted. The ineffable in emotion has normativity then, while the ineffable in perception plausibly does not, and we might think this makes a crucial difference to the relevance of such ineffability. Indeed, we might think agents are right to give emotional ineffability greater weight than everyday cases of perceptual ineffability.

Emotional ineffability then does not collapse into mere perceptual ineffability. Both involve attempts to translate across different representational formats, but the type of content in each case is different. In perception the representational content is descriptive,⁹ while in emotion it is evaluative. This makes all the difference as evaluative content is responsive to reasons as opposed to mere causes. Emotional ineffability involves experiences of warranted value that are hard to put into words. We can now provide the following working definition of emotional ineffability:

The ineffability of emotions involves attempting to translate *evaluative* experience, represented in analogue format, into language, a digital representational format.

Many philosophers take emotions to have non-conceptual evaluative content (Tappolet 2020; Döring 2007). But it remains quite an open question how exactly evaluative content might be non-conceptually structured. I cannot take up this issue fully here, but I would like to just briefly outline a promising way of developing an answer to this question. This is the possibility of constructing an affective quality space. An affective quality space is

⁹ This is consistent with granting that not all perception is entirely descriptive (perhaps we can perceive things ‘as’ or ‘in’ ways that incorporate some affect or valence, such as when a musician hears a mistake in a composition). We can grant this without denying that there is still a significant difference between perceptual experiences of this sort and full-blown occurrent emotional episodes. My claim can be specified as the thought that the more evaluative a relevant experience is, the higher its propensity to feel ineffable.

generated by mapping affective experiences along a number of subjectively discriminable axes or dimensions. Quality spaces have been constructed in cognitive science for the senses by combining empirical insights about perceptual processing systems with phenomenological insights (Gauker 2017; Gärdenfors 1996; Clark 1993). For example, the visual quality space maps experiences along the qualities of colour, shape, size and location, while smells are mapped according to pitch, loudness, timbre, and audible location. Distinct qualities (pitch, loudness etc.) form distinct axes along which a perceptual experience can be mapped. Crucially, quality spaces, also sometimes called similarity spaces, map experiences according to their felt or subjective qualities, making phenomenology key. Some philosophers of emotion take the intentionality of emotions to be inextricable from its phenomenology (Montague 2009; Johnston 2001). If this is plausible, it is an open possibility that emotions represent evaluative properties non-conceptually by occupying particular points in a multidimensional affective quality space. These representations would be in analogue, as opposed to digital, format as experiences are mapped along more than one dimension, thereby representing a number of features of their objects, and each dimension along which a particular experience is mapped varies continuously, as is typical of analogue representations. The particular dimensions along which affective experience is to be mapped should be determined through empirically informed theorizing. Some candidate dimensions might include: valence, arousal, novelty, coping potential and goal-conduciveness (Scherer, et al. 2006; Roseman 1991).¹⁰

A number of problems are likely to arise for the prospects of such a quality space, not least ones stemming from the disanalogies between emotion and perception, but it remains to be seen whether they are insurmountable.¹¹ In any case, it seems like a viable option to pursue in an attempt to characterize the evaluative non-conceptual content involved in emotion. For our current purposes, the goal was merely to bolster the general

¹⁰ I take appraisal theory to be a promising empirical research program that an affective quality space could be informed by. The various appraisal dimensions theorized by such accounts are candidate dimensions for an affective quality space that should be evaluated for their suitability. One concern is that many appraisal dimensions may not have clear consequences at the phenomenological level. Although it is far from clear how appraisal dimensions relate to emotion experience (see Teroni 2021), we might take this as one of the (many) constraints in theorizing relevant dimensions for an affective quality space. That is, we might only include as relevant axes those appraisal dimensions which plausibly contribute to subjectively discriminable differences in emotional experience.

¹¹ Note that an affective quality space does not rule out the possibility of unconscious emotions. Although features of conscious emotional experience are central to constructing the quality space, it is plausible that unconscious emotions also have specific qualities, albeit unfelt ones. Consider an unconscious perceptual representation of a red ball for example, one still represents the ball as being a particular shade of red despite this representation not featuring in consciousness. See Rosenthal (1991) on the independence of sensory qualities and consciousness.

thought, which is popular in the philosophy of emotion literature, that emotions have non-conceptual evaluative content, characterized by analogicity. It is this non-conceptual evaluative content that generates ineffability by resisting translation into the digital conceptual format of language. I will come back to the representational content of emotions in my final substantive section.

3. Evaluating the Ineffable

In his work on the ineffability of emotion, de Sousa's discussion revolves around two questions. First, whether it is indeed the case, as de Sousa takes Nietzsche to suggest, that when we attempt to articulate experience, our thoughts necessarily get translated back into the perspective of the 'herd'. That is, whether our experience can ever break through the conventions reflected in our linguistic resources. Second, how language affects emotional experience and whether these effects are positive or negative ones.

On the former de Sousa agrees with Nietzsche in some respects but not others. For one, in being non-conceptually structured, emotional experience may in some sense escape the perspective of the 'herd' as conceptually structured language is the shared mode of representation in which convention will be reflected. For de Sousa, emotional experience is 'constituted by the individuality of each person's life experience, as well as their genetic temperament.' (de Sousa 2011: 7). Each individual's emotional repertoire will differ from that of another such that when we communicate through the use of the limited emotion concepts we possess some of the individuality of our experience is necessarily lost. In this sense de Sousa agrees with Nietzsche, while disavowing the negative normative judgement Nietzsche espouses in calling this shared vernacular a feature of the 'herd'. Further, de Sousa grants that existing emotion terms and norms can influence emotional experience itself, such that language can affect the quality of non-conceptual representations involved in emotional experience.

This goes some way towards answering also the second question, on the effects of language on emotional experience. With respect to whether these effects are positive or negative, de Sousa (2011: 19) says that 'we are unlikely to find a standard answer to the question of whether changes in emotional experience should be seen as enhancing or as distorting.' This is because such changes can be evaluated along a number of orthogonal dimensions. Changes in emotional experience can enhance (or undermine) for example, adaptive ends, moral ends as well as one's aesthetic aims. Any linguistic effect on

emotional experience could then be positive on one dimension but negative on another. Furthermore, emotional dispositions will be deeply individual things on de Sousa's account, such that personal history and the particular circumstances of one's upbringing will partly determine which words affect one's experience and how. Given this, de Sousa takes the prospects of an evaluation of the effects of language on emotion to be unpromising.

I would like to propose that, if we take a decidedly more social orientation, the prospects of evaluating the effects of language on emotion proves both promising and pressing. The thought is that when we consider individuals as related to social structures such as systemic oppression,¹² a number of patterns in emotional experience might arise that allows us to better circumscribe how and when language is impacting on emotional experience, and to consequently give more determinate normative assessments on whether these effects are positive or negative. Similarly, taking such an approach will also allow us to determine positive cases where attempts at articulating the ineffable allow us to break through the language of the 'herd', thereby going against Nietzsche's contention. The sense of good and bad that I am concerned with here is moral, such that I grant that I am focusing on this axis of evaluation. My analysis will however hopefully show that focus on the moral is called for in such cases, such that it is possible, in at least some circumstances, to systematically determine which axis of value should be prioritized in an evaluation of the interactions between language and emotion. I will only be able to outline such an approach here, but I hope it to be informative. In short, I think the ineffability of emotion can leave individuals vulnerable to problematic harms, while also, at least sometimes, allowing individuals to counter and critique prevailing ideology.

3.1 The Ineffable as Vulnerability

Take the following example:

Raquel is a woman living under conditions of gender oppression in which the concept of sexual harassment is not available. Raquel is on a night out with a group of girlfriends. She feels someone squeeze part of her body and turns to see a man she has never met before. The man smiles at Raquel in acknowledgement of

¹² I understand oppression as a social injustice, that is to say that it is perpetrated through social institutions, practices, and norms. Certain social groups are systematically and unjustifiably disadvantaged by oppression, while other groups benefit from it.

having been the person to touch her, and walks away. Some of Raquel's friends feel excited by what just happened, and encourage her to go talk to the man. Others aren't excited but jealous for not having been the ones squeezed. Raquel believes she should be flattered by the attention she has received, as well as proud to have been the one approached, and indeed she does feel a mixture of these emotions, but she also feels uneasy and angry. (Silva 2021b)

Emotions such as Raquel's anger have been called 'outlaw emotions' because they are 'distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values' (Jaggar 1989: 166) that agents have often internalized. Agents that experience outlaw emotions regularly find it hard to name and understand their experiences as they often lack relevant concepts and/or capacities to apply them. When Raquel experiences anger, and lacks the conceptual resources to make sense of it, she plausibly suffers a hermeneutical epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). These injustices track gaps in hermeneutical, or interpretative, resources that disproportionately and unjustifiably affect particular social groups, such as women. As hermeneutical or interpretative resources are typically disproportionately constituted by the concerns and practices of dominant groups, it is marginalized groups that are predominantly affected by hermeneutical gaps. It is plausible then that the ineffability of emotions leaves marginalized groups particularly vulnerable to hermeneutical injustices. For, in attempting to translate non-conceptual experience into language, some groups are disproportionately and unjustifiably affected by existing hermeneutical resources and their shortcomings.

In line with this, the ineffability of emotions may also leave marginalized groups vulnerable to testimonial injustices (Fricker 2007). These are epistemic injustices of credibility deficits, where the testimony of particular individuals is given less credence due to their being members of a particular group. When trying to communicate her emotional experiences, Raquel may appear confused as she lacks adequate hermeneutical resources with which to interpret her own experience. This will presumably have a negative effect on her credibility. Even if Raquel succeeds in making sense of her experience, if dominant interpretative resources do not make room for it, her attempts to communicate that she has suffered a harm will be fruitless and her credibility will be negatively affected. Those listening to Raquel's testimony will lack a framework in which to understand her predicament as problematic. The ineffability of emotional experience

then, plausibly leaves marginalized agents particularly susceptible to testimonial injustices as well.

There are bound to be further ways in which the ineffability of emotion leaves marginalized agents vulnerable to epistemic injustices. For now, I hope to have highlighted that these specific types of interaction between emotion and language allow us to circumscribe classes of detrimental effects that are obscured when our inquiry unfolds entirely at the level of the individual. This also serves to highlight the extreme relevance of emotion for cases of epistemic injustice. This is a topic that to my knowledge has not received much attention in the now vast literature on epistemic injustice.

Note that although the cases above should be evaluated as negative, in a moral sense, the ineffability of Raquel's anger can indeed be simultaneously instrumentally beneficial for her. This is because, in Raquel's context, acting on and/or expressing her anger can be dangerous. Her anger goes entirely against the prevailing norms, such that acting on it may lead to derision, exclusion and even violence against her. In this sense, if the ineffability of her anger makes it more likely for Raquel not to act on her emotion, nor express it, then this would be instrumentally beneficial for Raquel. Orthogonal axes of evaluation therefore still abound, but it is hopefully clear that the moral axis is most relevant in these scenarios. Indeed, the ways in which the moral axis of evaluation interacts with other axes can give us insight into a number of further ways in which the ineffability of Raquel's anger might leave her vulnerable to distinctively *affective* injustices.

Recently, the domain of affective injustice has begun to be theorized (Whitney 2018; Archer and Mills 2020; Srinivasan 2018a). What makes an injustice distinctively affective remains to be specified but for our purposes I will take affective injustices to involve disproportionate and unjustified pressures on the affective lives of particular social groups. For example, in anger Raquel arguably suffers the affective injustice of having to strongly regulate her apt emotional response given that it could prove counterproductive (expressing her anger could provoke the man to become violent, as well as contribute to some level of social exclusion from her friends) (Srinivasan 2018a; Archer and Mills, 2021). This emotion regulation could take place at the level of action and expression control: attempting not to show or act on her anger, but it could also take place at the level of reappraisal, where Raquel would divert her attention to features of her experience that help her reinterpret the event as not meriting anger after all. Pressures

to repress and reappraise will disproportionately affect members of marginalized groups.¹³ It is plausible that the more ineffable an emotional experience is, the more susceptible it will be to repression and reappraisal, leaving marginalized agents such as Raquel particularly vulnerable.

This is related to what Archer and Matheson (2020) call the affective injustice of emotional imperialism. Emotional imperialism captures the pressure to conform to reigning emotion-norms regarding which emotions should be felt, when and by whom, as well as how they should (or shouldn't) be expressed. In addition to repression and reappraisal this type of injustice could cause Raquel to interpret her anger as a different emotion, one that better fits with her other beliefs and emotional dispositions. She could, for example, interpret her experience as a strange type of thrill rather than as an instance of anger as this would be more in keeping with prevailing ideology than anger. Alternatively, she might rightly interpret her emotion as an instance of anger but have in mind a concept of the emotion that is biased by unjust social arrangements. It has been argued that views of anger that prioritize its connection to revenge are overly vilifying in a non-accidental way: they serve to dismiss the emotion as dangerous and immoral, curtailing those with legitimate reasons for anger and safeguarding the interests of dominant groups (Srinivasan 2018; Silva 2021a). If Raquel believes herself to be angry, which on folk psychological accounts involves desires for revenge, yet herself feels no such desires (perhaps she merely feels a desire to have the wrong she has suffered acknowledged) then Raquel may again become doubtful that she really is angry.

We have seen then that affective injustices arise when dominant norms disproportionately and unjustifiably put pressure on particular social groups to repress and reappraise their emotions, as well as when these same norms lead to the miscategorization of emotion experience or the application of biased emotion concepts to one's experience. Whether and which of these occurrences count as distinctively affective injustices (the latter two might be best cast as sub-types of epistemic injustice) is a topic for another time. I hope merely to have highlighted that the ineffability of emotion leaves marginalized agents particularly vulnerable to not only well-established types of epistemic injustice, but also to injustices that are plausibly distinctively affective. In all these cases, the effects of

¹³ This will be particularly salient in the case of anger but by no means exclusive to it. If Raquel feels pride for behaviour that goes against her society's gender norms, for example pride regarding having a number of lovers, expressing this pride can be dangerous for much the same reasons.

language on emotion (including the lack of relevant linguistic resources) are decidedly problematic. The language of the ‘herd’, in which dominant norms are reflected, harms some groups more than others through its effects on emotional experience. Adding a social level of analysis to the problem de Sousa set for himself then, helps us provide more determinate answers to his question of how to evaluate the effects of language on emotion.

3.2 The Ineffable as Radical

Despite leaving some agents particularly vulnerable to a range of injustices, the ineffability of emotions also holds radical potential. By radical potential I mean the potential to operate, or contribute to, fundamental changes in social and political arrangements. First, focus on the ineffable can help us identify specific ways in which our emotional lives are particularly vulnerable to prevailing ideology. Attention to the ineffability of emotions allows us to acknowledge subtle forms of injustice, such as those just outlined above, and may provide the initial tools to help mitigate against them. The ineffability of emotions is in this way radical in an indirect sense. There are a number of more direct ways in which the ineffability of emotions may prove radical however. In those cases where epistemic and affective injustices of the sorts outlined above are to some extent curtailed, the ineffability of emotions, by transcending existing conceptual frameworks, contains radical alternative possibilities.

A first radical role is epistemic. Suppose that Raquel forms the belief that what the man did was not ok based on her outlaw anger, despite this belief going against her wider set of beliefs and emotional responses, as well as those of her peers. On a popular view of emotion epistemology, often called epistemic perceptualism, Raquel’s belief would be immediately justified, she would not need to grasp why she feels angry nor have independent reason to believe the man’s actions were wrong: her emotional experience is sufficient (Cowan 2016; Pelser 2014; Tappolet 2016). This means that ineffable emotional experiences, even one’s that one cannot name nor understand, can plausibly provide grounds for radical beliefs. In this way, Raquel’s anger can both cause and provide justification for a belief that she may have never formed had she not experienced outlaw anger. Her belief that what the man did was wrong is radical as it tracks a truth that prevailing norms conceal.

Raquel's anger can be epistemically radical in a second sense by motivating inquiry. Raquel's anger may trigger her to question and reflect on her experience, in doing so she may discover reasons for her anger and gain confidence that it is justified and that what the man did was indeed wrong. All emotions can motivate search for their reasons, but those emotional experiences that are particularly ineffable will, I believe, often be especially motivational. This is because the agent will often be particularly motivated to make sense of an emotion that is not easy to conceptualize or put into words. The ineffability of Raquel's anger then will be particularly motivational and may lead her down a radical route of inquiry: one that questions the validity of her internalized oppressive beliefs.

A third sense in which Raquel's anger can prove epistemically radical is by causing innovations in concepts and leading to novel evaluative understanding. Working to move from ineffable experience to articulated experience can result in the creation of new concepts to designate neglected classes of evaluative objects (Biss 2013). This is arguably what occurred in the genesis of the concept of 'sexual harassment' through consciousness raising efforts (Fricker 1991; Mackinnon 1979). Through collective discussion of various forms of discomfort, women came up with a concept under which all relevantly similar offenses fell. In so doing they came to appreciate what all such instances of offense, which can be extremely different in form, have in common. By doing this, they operated a breakthrough in evaluative understanding. In this sense Raquel's anger can play a determinant role in creating a world in which it can be adequately expressed.

Beyond these, and perhaps other, radical epistemic roles, the ineffability of emotions can allow agents to be morally radical. Merely by experiencing apt anger, Raquel may be more virtuous than if she had not, or than her friends who do not feel offended by the man's actions (Srinivasan 2018a; Bell 2009). Expressing her anger too, allows opportunities for holding the man accountable or at least communicating apt anger, which we might think virtuous in itself. Acting in accordance with anger, even if one doesn't understand why one is feeling this way, opens new possibilities for moral action. Further, acting based on any new evaluative understanding that Raquel's emotions might generate will often bring opportunities for moral action through political activism and education.

In sum, the ineffability of emotions holds great radical potential. These radical roles can be moral and/or epistemic, but in being radical they hold positive moral and political value. Moving beyond an individual level of analysis then allows us to better map when

and how the ineffability of emotion should be evaluated as positive along moral and/or political lines. As before, sometimes these radical roles will clash with the agent's instrumental goals, and sometimes put them in danger. But acknowledging this does not make it harder to evaluate such cases and indeed doing so allows us to discern specific types of injustices, including those outlined above, that often occur at the points of intersection where moral aims undermine instrumental ones. Emotions, at least sometimes, seem to be able to break through the language of the 'herd'. Their ineffability resists existing conceptual frameworks and opens possibilities for radical insight and action.

The question that might now arise is whether and why it is emotions, rather than other mental states, that have such radical potential. Part of the answer likely lies in the fact that emotions are relatively more encapsulated than many other mental states, such that they often enjoy some relative independence from the agent's wider belief-system (Majeed 2019). To paraphrase Jaggar (1989): the hegemony that society exercises over our emotional life is not total. Emotions, as we have seen, are also particularly ineffable as compared to other mental states, which makes them perhaps best suited to surpass or break through existing conventions reflected in language and belief. As emotional ineffability is evaluative it is also more relevant to challenging the evaluative, including the moral and political, status quo than non-evaluative experiential states.¹⁴ I would like to end by sketching an additional reason for the high radical potential that emotions enjoy. This has to do with the nature of their representational content and may contribute in turn to the high level of ineffability involved in emotional experience. This is the idea that emotions have what I will call modally complex representational contents.

4. Radical Content

It is plausible that emotions evaluate the world relative to our underlying desires and concerns, and perhaps other conative states such as wishes, wants and drives, they represent how we are faring relative to a range of underlying dispositions. These dispositions occur at all levels of our being: they can relate to physical well-being and

¹⁴ Compare emotions briefly to beliefs and perceptions. Emotions are 'more' ineffable than both. They are more ineffable than beliefs as beliefs are conceptually structured and therefore the issue of translation into digital format does not arise. Emotions are more ineffable than perceptions, as we have seen, due to involving non-conceptual content that is evaluative. This type of content makes emotional ineffability more salient and relevant. If ineffability is a key contributor to radical epistemic and practical roles, as I have argued, then emotions seem more equipped to play radical roles than both beliefs and perceptual states.

hunger as well as to high level desires such as professional, artistic and moral goals. Emotions evaluate how we are doing relative to this huge range of underlying dispositions. In doing so they put us in a relation to what is the case, but also to what could have been the case but is not. In loss for example one is gripped by the fact that one inhabits a world without a loved one, the many other worlds in which this loss does not occur are very close to this one, and seem involved in some way in emotional experience, in a manner that is often ineffable and overwhelming. You may experience conscious flashes or temporally extended imaginings of what this world will be like now that the loss has occurred. My idea, which will remain inevitably at the level of broad brush-strokes here, is that the way in which emotions represent evaluative properties relies on modal complexity.

Representing a situation as instantiating a particular evaluative property involves content with distinct modalities. It involves representing how things should be, while representing how they are. The difference between these two contents may be further represented by a range of counterfactuals of how things could have been. These counterfactual representations may take the form of imagery, which involves non-conceptual representations of non-actual states of affair.¹⁵ These can be conscious or unconscious and can involve imaginings, memories, perceptual expectations (including motor and interoceptive expectations) and phantom perceptions (perceptions of objects or movement that are not present) (Nanay 2021). While language represents specific modal scenarios through sentences such as ‘she will come’, ‘this is necessary’, emotions may represent a range of interrelated modal scenarios non-conceptually, through imagery of various sorts. The thought is that this set of representations with a range of modal contents contributes to the ineffability of emotion.

In one sense this is not a new suggestion, many have thought emotions to represent how agents are faring with respect to underlying desires (Deonna and Teroni 2012; Wollheim 1999). Two contents differing in modal content then are already uncontroversial (desires

¹⁵ Mental imagery has been defined as sensory representation without the corresponding sensory input (Nanay 2021). This includes a wide range of phenomena such as perceptual expectations, imaginings, dreams, memory, hallucinations, phantom perceptions, as well as amodal completion and peripheral vision. The latter two cases often involve representations of states of affair that are indeed the case, but where certain perceptual stimulation is lacking. For our purposes I am concerned with mental imagery that represents non-actual states of affair, so I do not have amodal completion or peripheral vision in mind. However, I do not mean to include dreams nor hallucinations into my use of the concept either. By mental imagery I refer to a smaller set of phenomena that include imaginings, memories, perceptual expectations and phantom perceptions (perceptions of objects or movement that are not present).

representing what should be, and the emotion representing what is). My thought is that these two representations are not so distinct, or at least that in virtue of being so intimately related (emotions represent how things stand *relative* to underlying states with distinct modality after all) emotions are states with modally complex representational contents. In addition to these two contents, in the desire and the emotion, I propose that a number of further representations are at play that increase the modal complexity by representing a number of alternative possibilities. These possibilities are not ones represented conceptually, but rather non-conceptually, plausibly through various types of imagery.

When standing very close to the edge of a cliff for example one can sometimes feel a faint urge to jump. This may be an example of imagery that contributes to the non-conceptual representation of danger. Jumping is one possibility amongst others of how to engage with the high cliff. An urge to jump, or a feeling of falling, may be the perceptual, and visceral, expectations related to this possibility. Perhaps the faint urge to jump is present because this is part of how we non-conceptually represent the danger in question. The feeling of vertigo itself might involve a phenomenally salient instance of a set of representations where a number of different ways of interacting with a height are represented. Similarly, as mentioned above regarding loss, mental imagery of distinct possibilities or scenarios may be involved in emotional experiences. The thought is that in other cases one's mental imagery will occur at the unconscious level. Nonetheless, emotional content would be modally complex by virtue of representing how things stand, how one wishes they stood, and how the two might relate to each other in various ways through a set of alternative scenarios and expectations.

The thought that emotions contain modally complex contents fits well with the idea of an affective quality space that I introduced in section 1. First, the axes involved in the affective quality space are likely to involve many of the very underlying concerns that emotions evaluate the world in relation to. For example, two of the axes I mentioned were control (or coping potential) and goal conduciveness (which is likely to involve a number of different types of goals, ranging from bodily protection to personal and moral goals). The affective quality space then, sets emotional representations up for modal complexity as points in the space will have different modality to the relevant axes (the former representing how things stand relative to the axes that represent how things should be). The additional imagery that I have argued is involved, and which adds further modal complexity by representing non-actual states of affairs, may be constitutive of emotion

phenomenology. If intentionality is inextricable from phenomenology then mental imagery will partly constitute evaluative content. It is an open possibility that evaluative properties are represented in part by mental imagery, including imaginings, expectations, memories and phantom perceptions. Where a point lies in the affective quality space then would depend on the imagery involved in particular emotional experiences. As imagery is thought to be non-conceptually structured, this fits well with the quality space which we saw above to involve analogue representations.

Why does modal complexity matter? Because both the ineffability of emotion and its radical potential may be rooted in modal complexity. If non-conceptual evaluative property representation turns out to depend on modal complexity, then the link between such modal content and the ineffability of emotion is established. For we saw that the ineffability of emotions involves attempts to translate non-conceptual evaluative content into language. If modal complexity does not constitute evaluative property representations but is in some sense still an important part of emotional content or emotion phenomenology, the link may remain. The relevance of modally complex content for radical potential is harder to establish but the thought is that in representing, non-conceptually, alternative possibilities for engagement with objects and related outcomes, emotions put us in contact with possible worlds.¹⁶ These possible worlds are ineffable to us but nonetheless have radical potential by representing that things can, and perhaps should, be different from how they are now. How things should be may be undefined but it feels nonetheless warranted that things be different. The ineffability of emotions can generate a sort of commitment to the undefined, to a currently indescribable

¹⁶ The notion of modal complexity I outline may bring to mind the concept of Gibsonian affordances. Affordances are properties that exist objectively in one's environment but only in relation to organisms and their abilities, such as an object's being 'eat-able' or 'throw-able'. A detailed investigation of how my proposal relates to affordances will have to await future work. For now, a few remarks can be made. First, Gibsonian affordances are proposed as objects of perception, while my notion of modal complexity concerns the nature of representations. Our proposals then concern different subject matters. Perhaps modally complex contents are a promising route to take in an explanation of how Gibsonian affordances can be represented. Two preliminary points on this possibility. First, Gibsonians believe affordances can be perceived without mental representations, creating a potential obstacle for such a move (Scarantino 2003). Nonetheless, it seems that a representationalist version of the view could be envisioned where emotions involve representing a particular set/type of affordance. Even once we grant that a representational Gibsonian project is viable however, the concept of modal complexity might set my view apart from theirs for the following reason: Gibsonian affordances are individuated in a manner relative to the behavioural capacities of organisms, such that action tendencies seem to be central and arguably sufficient to account for how subjects might perceive affordances (see for example Hufendiek 2015). The modal complexity I have in mind goes beyond action tendencies, involving also imagery of counterfactual possibilities for example. This suggests that the objects of emotions, construed as involving modally complex content, might not be mere Gibsonian affordances.

alternative that is nonetheless preferable to the status quo. If something of this sort is the case, then why emotions, rather than other mental states, hold particular radical potential becomes even more evident. For it is emotions, and not other types of mental state, that involve the modal complexity that puts us in ineffable contact with alternative possibilities.

5. Conclusion

I have sought to build on Ronald de Sousa's pioneering work on the ineffability of emotion. Three related contributions can be made out. First, I endeavored to highlight the importance of evaluative content for emotional ineffability. This type of content makes the ineffability of emotion both more salient and more relevant, imbuing it with normativity that perceptual ineffability plausibly lacks. My second contribution was to move beyond the individual level of analysis, that focusses on individual temperaments, histories and other particularities, to a social level of analysis that reveals a number of ways in which the ineffability of emotion can be evaluated. This led me to propose that the ineffable in emotion engenders both vulnerability to prevailing ideology, through susceptibility to particular epistemic and affective injustices, as well as generating radical potential to transform reality through epistemic, moral and political innovations. My third contribution was to sketch a metaphysics of emotion that is innkeeping with these claims. This involved introducing the affective quality space as an explanatorily fruitful framework for theorizing non-conceptual evaluative representations, as well as the proposal that such representations are characterized by modal complexity. In line with Pessoa's verse cited above, this latter proposal suggests that emotions are particularly well suited to put us in contact with undefined yet preferable alternative possibilities.

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