

Ronald de Sousa *Emotional Truth*. Oxford University Press 2011, xviii + 391 pp. £38

This book is a collection of facts and arguments about emotion as a feature of our thinking and planning lives. Behind it I can make out a big picture about successful thinking, including appropriate feeling as a special case. In this review rather than describe all the facts and arguments I shall try to discuss the big picture which, I should say clearly, de Sousa never states in the terms I am using. So what follows puts things in a broader and cruder way than he does. As I read de Sousa, his central aim is to explain and defend a view about the fulfilled or authentic life, and to do so on terms of a linked set of comparisons between emotions and beliefs. The working out of this aim is tangled and often bewildering, as well as being clever and often very stimulating. The most ambitious idea, though, is just the thought that such a project is possible, that by asking what the analogues for emotion of truth, knowledge, and rationality are we can get some hold on, well, the meaning of life. Very few will be converted to wholehearted acceptance of the idea by this book, and some will dismiss it out of hand. But a good proportion of readers should be struck by a grudging admission: there's something important here.

The picture of authentic life that is a background to much of the action is this. People vary in their deep emotional natures, let's say their emotional signatures, so it depends on a person's particular signature which emotions can be made central for her, determining the appropriateness of other states of all kind in a Humean passion-first way. The result can be pictured as like the variegated but thematically unified Jackson Pollock paintings de Sousa alludes to near the end of the book. Embracing these emotions and the themes that they engage is then what it is for that person to be true to herself. It is a kind of success that is different from contentment or getting what you want. Of course this is a metaphorical use of "true", but for all that it is the sort of thing people might naturally say. They might also say that the emotion rather than the person was true, unfaked, authentic, for that person in the context of what else she was feeling and doing.

Now see this through a more sedate take on truth and emotion. A sudden fear of someone can lead to a true belief that the person is dangerous. If the fear is operating as fear should, this might be knowledge. There might be no other way that person in those circumstances could have come to know of the danger. So emotions can lead to true beliefs, and their proper functioning can be part of good truth-directed thinking. An emotion can also be part of the realisation of a desire, of its content coming to be true. You want to express some home truths to an acquaintance, but cannot do it until you are angry enough with him. Or you feel generous to someone and that motivates a desire to ease her job problem, which you are in a position to do. In these cases there is a systematic connection between an emotion and a state of affairs, which mirrors the connection between a state of affairs and a belief that it makes true, or between a state of affairs and a desire which aims at bringing it about (and thus aims at the truth of a corresponding belief.) de Sousa is clear and helpful on all this. For him observations such as these offer a tantalising hint of a way of approaching the content of the previous paragraph with some analytical rigour. Central is the Humean principle that given the right emotions a person will think in ways that lead to knowledge and accomplishment. What makes them the right emotions is that they enable both successful belief and successful action.

There are two complications, that could be helpful or could be obstacles. The first is that emotions have both the belief-type direction of fit, where state fits world, and the desire-type fit, where world fits state. Often they seem to have both. In this they are like thinking; they fit the two fits together. The other is that truth is not knowledge of course, nor is the satisfaction of a desire the same as the person's accomplishing the desired thing's coming to pass. With belief, besides truth we have knowledge and justification and rational procedure, with no simple connection between them. So when an emotion is

well-tuned to the agent's situation, giving her the information she needs in order to produce the effects that fit her larger plans, should we see it as having something analogous to truth, or to knowledge and accomplishment, or to something in the category of reasonableness? de Sousa wants to call it truth. But he also emphasises the coherence aspect of the suitability of states: in particular how the choice of emotion depends on what else a person believes, wants, and feels. (And also, we might add, her manner of thinking and her virtues and failings.) This seems more like reasonableness.

Epistemologists often stumble on the simple fact of trivial and pointless knowledge. Knowing how many peanuts you have eaten on Tuesdays. There are also stupidly acquired true beliefs, and irrationally held true beliefs. Sometimes it is top quality thinking but still a waste of time. In recent years a number of epistemologists have wrestled with pointlessness and seen its implications. The aim of inquiry cannot just be true belief, and it cannot just be knowledge. Perhaps it is understanding; but there is stupid understanding too, as when you understand that the number of peanuts you have eaten on Tuesdays is more than three and less than the number of electrons in the universe. So worthwhile or valuable inquiry is not the same as successful inquiry. This suggests that worthwhile thinking in general, including the development and play of emotions, is not defined just by intrinsic content-focused criteria, analogous to truth or knowledge for beliefs, but also by the totality of a person's aims: the reasonableness dimension rather than the knowledge dimension.

These facts are friendly to de Sousa in one way. They support his holism about emotion. They are unfriendly in another way. They suggest that the analogy is not to truth-knowledge-understanding but to reasonableness-rationality-justification. No doubt these have fundamental connections, but they are particularly hard to make out in this moment of philosophy. In ancient pre-Gettier days there were internalists who thought that the addition of truth magics justified belief into knowledge (and presumably that the addition of satisfaction magics reasonable motivation into accomplishment.) Sometimes de Sousa seems nostalgic for such a position. Now many of us are externalists who think that justified beliefs are those that result from processes that in specific ways tend to produce truths. (So by analogy reasonable desires are those that tend to initiate successful actions? Some would find that hard to swallow.) This would put factors that enable success into the truth-like category. And de Sousa is generally on this side, so we might read him as trying for an externalist account of emotion. There is a tension here with the central role of coherence. It is just unclear what the connection between coherence and truth or success is. It is far from clear that researchers who fit everything into one mega-consistent pattern end up with more frequent true beliefs than those that tackle one problem at a time. It probably depends on the environment - the type of complexity of the world - and their individual epistemic emotions. Renouncing coherence brings worries in the case of failure, though. The well-thought-out and satisfying revolutionary rage that structures an unsuccessful life-long revolt will miss this kind of truth, even if the life it shapes is intuitively authentic. So will the deeply held devotion to a non-existent god. (This worry is at least partly dealt with by an aspect I have ignored: states are endowed with formal objects, so that a failed revolutionary sentiment can be successfully directed at the good.)

de Sousa does want both a generally success-oriented picture and an emphasis on coherence. One reason is that it makes lives into unified items, not just one damn event after another, where the value of any episode depends on how it fits with what surrounds it. So it makes a big difference whether the suggestion that individual people have emotional signatures is correct. de Sousa cites some interesting but possibly flaky research by Magai and Haviland-Jones (pp 84-6) pinning down characteristic patterns in different people's reactions to situations of importance. Without something like this idea it would be hard to live up to the neo-Humean principle that emotional coherence drives rationality, though we do

not have to assume that different human beings vary significantly. It helps here that de Sousa takes a wide range of states to be emotions, presumably including fundamental attitudes along the lines of Ratcliffe's feelings of being. I'd like to have seen more discussion of the possibilities here.

I have focused on a central strand in the book, ignorning many subsidiaries and digressions. Many of these are important. I have ignored interesting discussions of emotions and values, of formal objects of emotion, and of emotionalism in moral theory. I am particularly taken with the suggestion that a narrow construal of what falls under morality restricts the ability of politicians to get on high horses (p 148). There are many such delights, and I recommend the book to anyone with time, patience, or the ability to dip and skim. There's a lot here.

Adam Morton  
University of British Columbia  
adam.morton@ubc.ca