

Emotions and Their Rational Assessment (advanced level undergraduate)

Say that a friend of yours betrays a secret you've confided in him. Is it rational for you to become enraged? Some say no: Rage has a vengeful tendency that makes little sense, and usually makes a bad situation worse. Others say of course rage is rational: A friend's betrayal is an enraging event, and rage is the fitting response to it. In this class we investigate the various ways in which our emotions are subject to rational assessment, attempting to resolve this question and others like it.

We begin in Unit 1 with an overview of various theories concerning what emotions are. In Unit 2, we try and gain a better sense both of what it means for an emotion to fit its object, and what makes it the case that an emotion fits its object. Unit 3 focuses on how emotions can both hinder us and help us in achieving our practical ends. In Unit 4, we examine whether emotions play a role in facilitating certain types of knowledge or understanding. We also ask how these forms of assessment relate. For instance, might emotional fittingness be grounded in epistemological value?

This course demonstrates how close investigation of a topic relevant to our personal lives can also bear rich philosophical fruit. Although our focus is the rationality of emotion, our inquiry will force us to confront hard questions of much broader philosophical interest, about (for example) the sources of normativity. In addition to facilitating practice of the basic skills students will have learned in previous classes, assignments will be designed with an eye towards developing more advanced philosophical skills such as identifying parts of a reading subject to interesting objections, writing in a manner that is aware of potential interlocutors, and even some positive theory construction.

What is emotion?	James, W. (1884) What is an Emotion? Nussbaum, M. (2004) Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance Roberts, R. (1988) What an Emotion Is: A Sketch
Emotional fittingness	D'Arms, J. and D. Jacobson (2000) The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of the Emotions Wiggins, D. (1987) A Sensible Subjectivism? Shoemaker, D. (2017) Response-Dependent Responsibility; Or, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Blame
Practical value	Shaffer, J. (1983). An Assessment of Emotion Greenspan, P. (2000) Emotional Strategies and Rationality Leboeuf, C. (2018) Anger as a Political Emotion: A Phenomenological Perspective
Epistemological value	Brady, M. <i>Emotional Insight</i> ; Ch. 4 Jaggar, A. (1989) Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology Srinivasan, A. (2018) The Aptness of Anger