



**HAL**  
open science

## The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn

Pascal Engel

► **To cite this version:**

Pascal Engel. The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn. The value of emotions for knowledge, pp.215 - 232, 2019, 978-3-030-15666-4. 10.1007/978-3-030-15667-1\_10 . hal-03643986

**HAL Id: hal-03643986**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03643986>**

Submitted on 17 Apr 2022

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Metadata of the chapter that will be visualized in SpringerLink

---

Book Title	The Value of Emotions for Knowledge	
Series Title		
Chapter Title	The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn	
Copyright Year	2019	
Copyright HolderName	The Author(s)	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	<b>Engel</b>
	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>Pascal</b>
	Prefix	
	Suffix	
	Role	
	Division	
	Organization	École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)
	Address	Paris, France
	Email	pascal.engel@ehess.fr
Abstract	It is often said that we can have reasons for our emotions. But can such reasons be the basis for some form of knowledge? I attempt here to give a positive answer to this question, through an examination of two negative emotions, anger, and contempt. I suggest that these emotions are apt to deliver, albeit in an indirect way, a form of moral knowledge, and examine their expression in the writings of Jonathan Swift.	
Keywords (separated by '-')	Emotional justification - Contempt - Moral values - Jonathan Swift	

---



# 10

## The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn

Pascal Engel

*for Patrizia Lombardo*

### 1 Introduction

Can there be reasons for emotions, and can emotions be the basis for some kind of knowledge? I shall give a positive answer to these questions, but it will be limited in three respects. I shall deal only with two emotions, anger and contempt. I shall claim that the kind of knowledge they give us is a very specific instance of knowledge, moral knowledge. This entails that there can be such knowledge, a view which I cannot argue for, but which I shall presuppose. I shall not take my material from psychology and affective sciences, but from literature, and even more specifically, from Jonathan Swift. My justification for this strategy is that literary works can give us as much insights on emotions, through

AQ1

---

A1 P. Engel (✉)

A2 École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris, France

A3 e-mail: [pascal.engel@ehess.fr](mailto:pascal.engel@ehess.fr)



## 2 P. Engel

16 ideal types, as experimental approaches.<sup>1</sup> The thesis which I want to  
17 defend is that the emotions of anger and contempt, as they are mani-  
18 fested in literary form in Swift's satires, express a certain kind of moral  
19 knowledge. Why, could one ask, should such an idiosyncratic expres-  
20 sion of an emotion through literary form be informative? The answer  
21 lies in the specific nature of Swift's satire, which is very personal, with-  
22 out being autobiographical. As Claude Rawson notes, "The closeness of  
23 Swift's temperament to the things he attacked is a defining feature of his  
24 writing, and one of which he was edgily self-aware. He evokes it with  
25 a minutely inward participation" (Rawson 2014, p. 1). By focusing on  
26 Swift, I try to follow the lead of writers who take literature as a source of  
27 case studies for knowledge about mind and emotion. This knowledge,  
28 I shall argue, is not direct, but indirect, and mostly based on a certain  
29 view of virtues and vices.

## 30 2 Emotional Reasons and Justification

31 Whether or not one agrees that knowledge is justified true belief,  
32 knowledge at least involves having reasons for what one knows, whether  
33 or not we have access to these. Can emotions give us reasons and can  
34 they be reasons? The answer depends of course upon the theory of emo-  
35 tions that one holds. There must also be enough similarity between rea-  
36 sons for emotions and reasons for other familiar attitudes, such as belief  
37 and desire.

38 I shall rely on four assumptions which have been accepted by a  
39 number of writers on emotions. The first is that emotions are inten-  
40 tional states or episodes, which have a specific content which is most  
41 of time propositional, but which can also be directed at an object: one  
42 is afraid *that p* or *of someone* or *something*, happy that *p*, angry that *p*  
43 or *at something* or *at someone*. The second is that emotions are associ-  
44 ated with typical bodily reactions, and have a specific phenomenology  
45 or feel, although the variations can be wide (sometimes it does not

---

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Robinson (2005) and Lombardo (2014).



## 10 The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn 3

46 feel in a specific way to be afraid, and there are cold angers). A third  
47 assumption is that emotions involve a certain kind of appraisal, related  
48 to their valence: they are negative or positive. A fourth assumption is  
49 that emotions have a *formal object*, which is not the object which they  
50 have as token episodes (such as fear of this dog, anger at this person at  
51 this very moment), but the type of object at which their contents are  
52 directed. This idea is in general expressed in the following way: fear's  
53 formal object is what is *fearable* or *frightening*, anger's formal object is  
54 what is *worthy of irritation*. Each emotion has its own formal object. An  
55 emotion is correct when it fits its formal object. In this sense one can  
56 speak of emotional truth, when the emotion toward a certain content  
57 or object is appropriate to its formal object (Mulligan 2003; de Sousa  
58 2011; Deonna and Teroni 2012). If we think of emotions as attitudes  
59 and dispositions rather than as specific episodes, we can ascribe to them  
60 properties which they share with epistemic attitudes such as beliefs,  
61 doubts or presumptions. Thus we can also say that emotions are justi-  
62 fied when they fit their formal object. Emotions can have reasons. We  
63 say that we have reasons for being afraid or angry. They can also be rea-  
64 sons for epistemic attitudes. Thus my being surprised that Mary came  
65 may be a reason for my fear that Jane would not like it. Emotions can  
66 be factive: to be disgusted at something, or to be horrified at something  
67 seem to presuppose that this something exists (Gordon 1987).

68 Does the fact that emotions involve these epistemic liaisons entail  
69 that they have a genuine epistemic role, such as being justifiers for epis-  
70 temic attitudes? It is one thing to say that they can have cognitive role  
71 or value, and another to say that they can be justified, possibly true, or  
72 that they can yield knowledge. If emotions can have reasons or if they  
73 can be reasons, they must have the properties usually ascribed to reasons  
74 (Skorupski 2010). Moreover the reasons have to be epistemic. For this  
75 there must be a relation between an emotion as reason and a certain  
76 attitude of -ing. The emotion as reason has to be a relation to a fact. If  
77 the reason is epistemic, it has to be a matter of degree, and is most of  
78 the time relative to circumstances. If it can justify an attitude, it has to  
79 be sufficient for justification. Thus my reason to be angry at the rise of  
80 the price of fuel is the fact that the taxes for fuel went up. My anger will  
81 be justified if the raise of prices of fuel is a sufficient reason for being



#### 4 P. Engel

82 angry. We can also say that it is correct because it is fitting to the cir-  
83 cumstance. But what is it for an emotion to be fitting? Some angers are  
84 justified, some others are not. The price of fuel often rises up. But when  
85 does it become a reason for anger? When we are told that Achilles was  
86 angry at Agamemnon for the loss of his captive slave Briseis, we feel that  
87 the hero was angry for a bad reason, but when we are told that he was  
88 angry at Hector for the loss of his friend Patroclus, we feel that his anger  
89 was for a good reason. But where does the difference lie? Not only one  
90 can have an emotion like anger for good, bad, better or worse reasons,  
91 but it can be had for the wrong kind of reason. Suppose that a pow-  
92 erful demon threatens to torture me to death unless I do not become  
93 angry at someone who has been very nice and helpful to me. If I man-  
94 age to obey his order, I will be angry for the wrong kind of reason. The  
95 attitude does not fit the object. In contrast being offended after having  
96 been insulted seems to be a right kind of reason for being angry. This  
97 distinction is indeed similar to the right/wrong kind of reasons distinc-  
98 tion which has been raised for attitudes in general (see Rabinowicz and  
99 Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004; Parfit 2011: Appendix A; Skorupski 2010).  
100 So if there are to be reasons for emotions, there must be a right/wrong  
101 kind of reason problem.

AQ3

102 The reason relation for emotions actually goes into both directions:  
103 What is the basis of our reasons for emotions? Let us call this basis *rea-*  
104 *sons from*. How can they be reasons for other states and attitudes? Let us  
105 call these *reasons for*. Both questions are epistemological. What is the  
106 kind of state which justifies an emotion? If we accept the view that emo-  
107 tions involve or can be grounds for, evaluative judgments, how can they  
108 justify these judgments? The four assumptions mentioned above suggest  
109 a parallel between the familiar problem of the justification of perceptual  
110 beliefs and the problem of the justification of emotions. Many writers  
111 have espoused a perceptual model of the justification of the value judg-  
112 ments associated to an emotion: just as our perceptual beliefs (say, my  
113 belief *that this is a tree*) are based on our perceptual experiences (*this*  
114 *looks like a tree*), our emotional experiences (say, my experiencing fear  
115 *of this dog*) are the base of our evaluative judgments (*this dog is danger-*  
116 *ous*). The analogy with perception is all the more tempting that the cog-  
117 nitive base of the emotional experience is itself a perceptual experience



## 10 The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn 5

118 (my *seeing this big salivating dog*). So on this model emotional justi-  
 119 fication seems to involve a double link: an emotion is justified for an  
 120 agent just in case (i) the agent's beliefs about the object of the emotion  
 121 on which the emotion is based are (epistemically) justified, and (ii) the  
 122 emotion is an appropriate or fitting response to the situation as it is  
 123 experienced by the agent.

124 The trouble is that this model is much too simple. Is the relation  
 125 between the experiential base and the emotion an evidential relation? In  
 126 the case of belief, a reason is sufficient in so far as it is good enough to  
 127 justify some action or belief by itself; a sufficient reason makes the belief  
 128 permissible. But sufficient reasons do not make believing obligatory, nor  
 129 do they entail the correctness or the truth of some belief; they thus fall  
 130 short of being conclusive. So reasons can be defeasible, as the perceptual  
 131 model maintains, and still be sufficient; and reasons will be sufficient to  
 132 justify belief in conditions in which there are no defeaters. Many have  
 133 held that the reason or justifying relation is weaker than a sufficient rela-  
 134 tion, a mere *prima facie* kind of justification, or an entitlement relation.  
 135 This condition holds even more for emotions. My learning that the  
 136 price of fuel has gone up is a defeasible reason for my being angry and  
 137 for my belief that it is unjust that the price of fuel arises. And indeed it  
 138 is defeasible: there are many more things worthy of being angry about,  
 139 and in many cases the rise of the price of fuel is not worthy of anger.

140 As soon as one asks about the justification of emotions on this model  
 141 in analogy with the justification of perceptual beliefs, a lot of questions  
 142 arise. If emotions are supposed to be fit or correct because they are justi-  
 143 fied by the experiences on which they are based, is the justification  
 144 based on evidence for the evaluative judgment which is supposed to be  
 145 associated to it? The latter is clearly not inferred from the former. If, on  
 146 the contrary, we take the justification to be immediate, as if it sprung  
 147 directly from the emotional feel, how can it be transparent?<sup>2</sup> In other  
 148 words, can we move immediately from the content of the experience  
 149 (say *this is a big dog*) which produces an emotion (*fear of the dog*) to the

---

<sup>2</sup>Brogaard and Chudnoff (2016) and Echeverri (2017) argue against this alleged transparency of the “dogmatist” view of emotional justification. Although they do not quote Pryor (2000) (as Echeverri 2017 does), they clearly want to refer to an analogue of this view for emotions.



## 6 P. Engel

150 evaluative judgment (*this dog is dangerous*)? Or is the justification medi-  
151 ated by beliefs? Some writers have talked of emotionally laden beliefs.<sup>3</sup>  
152 But as soon as the cognitive basis of our emotional experiences becomes  
153 belief-laden, a dilemma looms: either it is the *beliefs* which accompany  
154 an emotion which are justified, in which case the emotion as a feeling is  
155 not in itself justified, or it is the emotion *as feeling* (as phenomenal feel)  
156 which is justified, in which case the justification is based only upon an  
157 affect, hence no justification at all. For an example of the first horn, take  
158 surprise. Surprise is an emotion mediated by beliefs—antecedent belief  
159 that not  $p$ , further discovery that  $p$ , surprise that  $p$ —but if only the  
160 beliefs have a justificatory power, the emotional import of the feeling of  
161 surprise does not play any epistemological role: the evaluation is purely  
162 cognitive. On the second horn, if we say that it is only the emotional  
163 part of surprise which is justified, how can the feeling itself (the startle,  
164 the eyebrows that raise, the pupil that dilate) have any epistemological  
165 import, and if there is such an import, how can it be transparent? If it  
166 is—that is if we can move from the perception to the evaluation of sur-  
167 prisingness (or dangerousness in the case of fear), the justificatory link  
168 between experience and belief in the emotional case is similar to the jus-  
169 tificatory link in the perceptual case according to the so-called “dogma-  
170 tist” view of perceptual justification. So, if your emotional response to a  
171 perceived object makes it seem to you that that object or event possesses  
172 some evaluative property, then you thereby have *prima facie*, immediate  
173 justification for believing that that object or event possesses that evalu-  
174 ative property. But if this were true, then fear, guilt and anger, absent  
175 defeating evidence, would immediately justify beliefs, rationalizing  
176 avoidance, self-condemnation, and retaliation. But we rarely take our  
177 emotions at face value, or if we do we should avoid doing so: they must  
178 also be related to certain beliefs and desires, which, together with the  
179 emotion and the value judgments, constitute our reasons to act. There  
180 are further disanalogies between the perceptual and the emotional case.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Stocker (1987) talks of “emotionally laden beliefs” which are ways the beliefs are taken. But what is justified? The beliefs, or their emotional charge?

<sup>4</sup>See in particular Brady (2013).



181 Now, from the fact that the perceptual model of emotional justifi-  
182 cation is hard to sustain literally at the level of the *reason-from*, does it  
183 follow that we should withdraw any hope of establishing a *reason-for*  
184 relation between emotional experience and the perception of value?  
185 No. Proponents of the perceptual model give examples such as being  
186 struck by the injustice of slavery through the emotion felt in read-  
187 ing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or by the beauty of nature through the emo-  
188 tion of contemplating a sunset over the *Grand Teton National Park*,  
189 but the ways of the perception of values are most of the time more  
190 complex: reading *Huckleberry Finn* or contemplating the English  
191 countryside at daybreak on a fine summer day may give rise to more  
192 complex associations of emotional experience and value. The fact that  
193 we do not typically trust emotions as sufficient reasons to form eval-  
194 uative judgments, but rather as reasons to look for non-emotional  
195 reasons to confirm our initial emotional appraisal does not show that  
196 this initial appraisal cannot justify the evaluative judgments, but just  
197 that the justificatory route is more complex. The relationship between  
198 emotional experience and evaluative beliefs need be neither direct nor  
199 foundational in the sense suggested by the simple perceptual model.  
200 It can be holistic, and such that the emotional experience and its rela-  
201 tion to values is further confirmed by related beliefs. The fit between  
202 the perceived situation, the emotion and the issued value judgments  
203 may be more a matter of coherence than a matter of perceptual basis,  
204 and the correctness of emotions need not be based on some mysteri-  
205 ous capacity of grasping the values within the emotional experiences.  
206 The relation between the emotion and the value need not be itself per-  
207 ceptual, but can be based on the idea that the correctness of the emo-  
208 tion is due to an appropriate response to a perceived event or action.  
209 Emotions in this sense are sources of reasons, and do not have direct  
210 epistemological impact.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>De Sousa says that the role of emotions is often to attract our attention: "Paying attention to certain things is a source of reasons" (1987, p. 196). So the kind of skepticism about the perceptual model expressed by Brady (2013) need not entail the falsity of the correctness account of emotions. De Sousa (2011) suggests a more coherentist model. Pelsler (2014) and Tappolet (2016) have proposed more sophisticated accounts of the perceptual model.

211 **3 The Elusiveness of Anger and Contempt**

212 Anger and contempt are both negative emotions which illustrate the  
 213 features listed above almost paradigmatically. Aristotle defines anger  
 214 as “an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a  
 215 conspicuous slight directed without justification toward what con-  
 216 cerns oneself or toward what concerns one’s friends” (*Rhetorics*,  
 217 1378a31–1378b9). The feeling is of pain, but the formal object, what is  
 218 anger-worthy,<sup>6</sup> is a complex relational content directed to someone for a  
 219 reason, involving a judgment, to the effect that an injustice toward one-  
 220 self or one’s friends. The emotion is factive, in Gordon’s (1987) sense:  
 221 it is based on the knowledge that someone has done you some harm  
 222 (say, insulting you), which—if something like the perceptual account is  
 223 right—justifies one to judge that one has been offended by someone.  
 224 The latter judgment is a moral one: some injustice has been done to  
 225 you. How can the emotion be correct or fit its object? A certain stand-  
 226 ard, or norm, has been violated. The question immediately arises: how  
 227 can the emotion be a reason for a judgment about an objective moral  
 228 subject matter? For the feeling may be transitory and the judgments can  
 229 change. Anger is most often directed not at a particular action or trait,  
 230 but at the whole person. In Ariosto’s epic *Orlando furioso*, the Christian  
 231 knight Roland becomes furious when he discovers Angelica’s love for the  
 232 Saracen Medoro. But he could have been frenzied for another reason, and  
 233 his judgment that an offense has been done to him might have been  
 234 based on other moral standards than those of medieval chivalry. We  
 235 can have distinct views of the objectivity of the standards, and one can  
 236 be a non-cognitivist or a cognitivist about the nature of values, but at  
 237 least the evaluative judgment to the effect that some injustice has been  
 238 committed *purports* to be objective. This is enough for a contemporary  
 239 reader to be able to understand Roland’s wrath.

240 Contempt is, among the emotions, one of the least typical, for it  
 241 seems to lack any characteristic feeling and bodily expression. It is a very

---

<sup>6</sup>There is no lexical item in English corresponding to what is the formal object of anger, in the ways the *admirable* is the formal object of admiration.



242 cognitive emotion, which seems to be mostly constituted by a certain  
 243 kind of judgment appraising the status of its object, and the curling of  
 244 the lips, joined and retracted in a derisive or sardonic smile cannot be  
 245 its paradigmatic expressions. The judgment is such that it is directed at  
 246 the whole person which is its object (if I have scorn for the way your  
 247 dress, my scorn is directed at *you*, not at your particular clothing) and  
 248 such that the person in question is taken to be inferior. Like anger, it is  
 249 a “globalist” emotion (Bell 2013, p. 37) or a “characterizing attitude”  
 250 (Darwall 2018). Perhaps we may call it, following Strawson (1962),  
 251 a “reactive attitude”, expressing a global set of emotions and feelings,  
 252 which are constitutive of our status as persons and of the attitudes that  
 253 we have to other persons. Strawson says that such attitudes can be either  
 254 “objective”—when we distance ourselves from others and consider them  
 255 as non-free, non-responsible and not liable to praise or blame—or “sub-  
 256 jective”, when we take others as free and liable to evaluative judgments.  
 257 Unlike other emotions, contempt is a disposition, and rarely an episodic  
 258 mental occurrence, and when it is associated to a feeling, its scope can  
 259 vary, from mere amusement and derision to deep hatred. But what is it,  
 260 for a contempt to be fitting as an emotion? Just as for anger, the objects  
 261 of contempt can be very diverse, in the sense that the kind of behaviors  
 262 which might elicit contempt and the judgment of superiority which is  
 263 associated to it are themselves very diverse. If contempt is linked to the  
 264 perception of a social hierarchy and directed at a social status, there will as  
 265 many kinds of reasons for contempt as there are kinds of social stand-  
 266 ards within a society or from one society to another: being the object of  
 267 contempt in India for being an untouchable, being the object of con-  
 268 tempt at the court of Louis XIV in Versailles because one does not have  
 269 the proper degree of nobility, or being the target of the contempt of a  
 270 snob in Victorian England seem to correspond to so many situations  
 271 that it is hard to say that there are precise correctness conditions for  
 272 this emotion. Think for instance of the way Tocqueville describes the  
 273 relationship between men and women in America as contrasted with  
 274 Europe:

275 It has often been remarked that in Europe a certain degree of contempt  
 276 lurks even in the flattery which men lavish upon women: although a



## 10 P. Engel

277 European frequently affects to be the slave of woman, it may be seen that  
278 he never sincerely thinks her his equal. In the United States men seldom  
279 compliment women, but they daily show how much they esteem them.  
280 (Tocqueville 1835, Ch. 11)<sup>7</sup>

281 In a democratic society, which aspires to equal status for individuals,  
282 contempt will be an emotion which is itself the object of a general nega-  
283 tive moral judgment. Kant (1785) famously says that contempt violates  
284 people's basic claim of respect against others because it construes people  
285 as lacking dignity and as having no moral worth, hence as unable of  
286 improving. Kant denies that there can be any good reason for contempt,  
287 hence that the reasons for being scornful are always *wrong*, because they  
288 contradict a basic principle of morality. This is bad news for the per-  
289 ceptual theory of emotions as tracking values, because, on this view,  
290 the evaluative judgment associated to contempt would always be false,  
291 and the emotion of contempt would be always inappropriate. As Bell  
292 notes, the rejection of contempt is due to its globalist nature. In this  
293 sense, it seems to be not only to be rejected for moral reasons, but also  
294 for descriptive ones. For, as many psychologists have argued, there are  
295 no such global emotions: characters traits are inconsistent, transitory,  
296 unstable.<sup>8</sup> So contempt never fits its object, and is always based on a  
297 false ascription of character. The objection extends to the "fitting atti-  
298 tude" conception of value: there is nothing like being fit for such an  
299 emotion, because we can never specify its conditions of appropriateness.

300 This objection presupposes that the fittingness of an emotion is a  
301 descriptive property. But this is wrong. The fitting attitude or "neo-sen-  
302 timentalist" analysis of emotions, as it is sometimes called (Tappolet  
303 2016, p. 85 sq.),<sup>9</sup> says that evaluative and normative concepts are essen-  
304 tially tied to the concepts of specific responses, although it does not say  
305 that these concepts are mere projections of our emotional responses. For  
306 instance a particular action counts as admirable if the feeling of admira-  
307 tion is an appropriate response to this action, of fits it. This condition of

---

<sup>7</sup>Indeed many contemporary American feminists would balk at this.

<sup>8</sup>See e.g. Doris (2005). This is the line taken by "situationism" about character or virtue.

<sup>9</sup>Tappolet (2016, p. 85 sq.).



308 correctness is meant to be a conceptual analysis. But it encounters two  
 309 difficulties. The first is that it seems circular: we are told that an emo-  
 310 tion is correct when the responses are fitted to the value or norm, admi-  
 311 ration to the admirable, anger to irascible-worthiness, contempt to the  
 312 contemptible. The second is that it is formulated in normative terms,  
 313 involving appropriateness and correctness: the idea is that a certain kind  
 314 of feeling is *required*, or such that we *ought* to have it in order to fit the  
 315 value in question. But if it is supposed to be a version of the perceptual  
 316 analysis, it does not suit well with a naturalist construal of the psycho-  
 317 logical state of emotion, for it seems odd to say that we perceive norma-  
 318 tive concepts. We need not, however, accept this descriptive construal of  
 319 the perceptual analysis—of if it is a consequence of it, we should reject  
 320 this analysis.<sup>10</sup> The fittingness conditions do not refer to an actual per-  
 321 ception of value, nor to descriptive traits of character in individuals, but  
 322 to an ideal of what individuals ought to be. In this sense, the Kantian  
 323 interpretation of contempt is right: it refers to a judgment about what  
 324 this emotion presupposes about humanity. But does that mean, as Kant  
 325 implies, that this judgment is wrong? After all, some features of human-  
 326 ity and some kinds of actions, might be contemptible, and it might be  
 327 correct to point them out, and thus to withdraw the principled attitude  
 328 of respect which Kant deemed to be the very foundation of morality.

## 329 4 Contempt and Moral Knowledge: 330 A Swifteen Story

331 Neither the perceptual model of emotional justification nor the fitting-  
 332 ness account entail that our perception of value on the basis of emotions  
 333 have to be direct or immediate, as if we reacted to injustice in a bout  
 334 of furor, or to the vileness of a character in a hiccough of scorn. Most  
 335 “moral” emotions, such as shame, pity or contempt are not episodic,

---

<sup>10</sup>I thus would disagree with Tappolet (2016), who aims to defend such a sophisticated version of the perceptual view.

**12 P. Engel**

336 but dispositional. They can become virtues or vices, in so far as virtues  
337 and vices are based on dispositions. And they involve complex judgments  
338 and appraisals. An essential feature of most emotions is the capacity to  
339 reappraise them, and to revise them in the light of further emotions and  
340 judgments.<sup>11</sup> When they reach a certain level of sophistication, we learn  
341 much more from literature than from neuroscience and social psychol-  
342 ogy. The thesis which I want to put forward, but cannot argue in the  
343 space of this essay, is that moral emotions like anger and contempt do  
344 not involve judgments about values but judgments about characters  
345 who instantiate, or fail to instantiate these values. In other words, they  
346 involve judgments about virtue and vice, as dispositions stemming from  
347 emotions and involving dispositions to good or bad behavior. But anger  
348 and contempt are not only complex emotions involving judgments,  
349 they are also, as dispositions and character traits, the object of our moral  
350 appraisal. This is why, in particular, contempt has a bad reputation, as it  
351 is based on the feeling of superiority toward others. Both the tradition  
352 and common sense take it as itself despicable, as based on a wrong rela-  
353 tion to values and reasons for emotions. I want to suggest that it is not:  
354 not only there can be reasons for contempt, and there are reasons for  
355 wrath, but these are also good reasons.

356 The Christian tradition has taken contempt to be in its very nature  
357 opposed to the virtue of humility. Its name is *superbia*, a vice of supe-  
358 riority. But the literary tradition of comedy and of satire has pro-  
359 moted contempt as the proper attitude toward the vices of human  
360 nature. Jonathan Swift was an heir to both traditions: he was a devoted  
361 Christian and a stubborn satirist. He has often been described as the  
362 arch-contemptor, a master of scorn. His specific feelings have been  
363 described by Samuel Johnson (1779) as a mixture of “petulance and sar-  
364 casm”, of “arrogance and raillery”, of a man who has “wasted his life  
365 in discontent”. Thackeray (1854) says that if you had been his infe-  
366 rior “he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you”, and if you  
367 had addressed him as a Yeats calls him “intense” and “vehement”.<sup>12</sup>  
368 Swift himself said that his *Travels* “are erected upon a foundation of

---

<sup>11</sup>This feature has been well analyzed in the pioneering work of Livet (2002).

<sup>12</sup>Johnson (1779) and Thackeray (1854).



## 10 The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn 13

369 misanthropy” and his famous epitaph at St Patrick in Dublin says that  
 370 *saeva indignatio* cannot anymore “lacerate his breast”. He has been  
 371 ascribed all the traditional vices of superiority: Arrogance, Superbia,  
 372 Hypocrisy, Apathy, Cruelty, Greed, Jealousy, Recklessness, Bitterness,  
 373 Gluttony, Lust, Wrath. Such accusations are often addressed to the  
 374 satirist. He displays contempt, scorn, haughtiness toward those that  
 375 he satirizes, and his message is merely one of pride and superiority.  
 376 Those who show such superiority not only have to be blamed because  
 377 they do not respect their fellow mortals, but also because they do not  
 378 deserve any respect. Swift was no exception. His morality, most biogra-  
 379 phers suggest, was questionable. He was, in the words of the critic John  
 380 Middleton-Murry (1954), a “hypocrite reversed”, one who turns toward  
 381 others the accusation of viciousness that he himself knows to deserve.  
 382 Contempt and anger are the engines of Swift’s satire. “In a Jest, he said  
 383 us, I spend my Rage”, preferring to ‘encounter Vice with Mirth’ (*Epistle*  
 384 *to a Lady*, Poems, II, p. 218). As Claude Rawson says “The angers, of  
 385 course, were all too real, but Swift was temperamentally equivocal about  
 386 their display. Even when we may suppose them to have been at white  
 387 heat, as in *A Tale of a Tub*, the brilliant aggressive vitality is designed,  
 388 for all the intensity of its sting, never to lose its cool. The contemptu-  
 389 ous energy with which he mimicked the forms of ‘modern’ egocentrism  
 390 and the self-promoting typographical antics of what we now like to call  
 391 ‘print culture’, is a billowing performance of indignant impersonation  
 392 in which the force and incriminating accuracy of the aggression never  
 393 shows loss of authorial composure” (Rawson 2014, pp. 1–2).

AQ5

394 Swift’s angers are often characterized as a form of moral hatred.  
 395 Swift’s contempt was clearly on the subjective side of Strawson’s reac-  
 396 tive attitudes, even though he often seems to adopt the objective stance.  
 397 On the one hand, the satirist’s expression of contempt through irony  
 398 presupposes that he distances himself from the characters that he rep-  
 399 resents, and often takes them as unfree, as mere puppets ruled by their  
 400 passions. As F. R. Leavis says,

401 Swift’s ironic intensity undeniably directs itself to the defense of some-  
 402 thing that he is intensely concerned to defend, the effect is essentially  
 403 negative. The positive itself appears only negatively— a kind of skeletal



## 14 P. Engel

404 presence, rigid enough, but without life or body; a necessary pre-condition,  
405 as it were, of directed negation. The intensity is purely destructive.  
406 (Leavis 1952, p. 75)

407 Leavis contrasts Swift's irony with that of Gibbons, which "insinuates a solidarity  
408 with the reader (the implied solidarity in Swift is itself ironical—a  
409 means to betrayal)" (ibid.). On the other hand, the satirist could not judge  
410 and disvalue these characters if he did not adopt the participant's attitude.  
411 His irony is directed at humans in general, although he knows that he is  
412 one of them.

413 When we talk of Swift's anger and of his contemptuous feelings, we  
414 are not talking about biographical or psychological facts. We are talking  
415 about what the reader can read into his prose, and the portrait that he  
416 implicitly draws of himself as a contemptuous and angry figure. Anger  
417 and contempt are not feelings or emotions which are represented within  
418 Swift prose, as features of his fictional characters. They are inferred by  
419 the reader through certain cues, the most salient being his irony.

420 Swift, however, is quite clear, and literally so, about his moralistic  
421 intentions:

422 I have been only a Man of Rhimes, and that upon Trifles, yet never any  
423 without a moral View. (*Correspondence* iv, p. 52)

424 "There are two Ends that Men propose in writing Satyr," private  
425 Satisfaction and a public Spirit, prompting Men of Genius and Virtue, to  
426 mend the World as far as they are able. (*The Intelligencer*, vol. III, 1728,  
427 in *Prose Works*, XII, p. 34)

428 But if my Design be to make Mankind better, then I think it is my Duty.  
429 (*Prose Works* XII, p. 34)

430 You see Pope, Gay, and I use all our Endeavours to make folks Merry and  
431 wise. (*Correspondence*, iv. p. 53)

432 I have finished my *Travells*...they are admirable Things, and will wonder-  
433 fully mend the World. (Letter to Ford, 27 August 1721, *Correspondence*,  
434 III, p. 87)

435 I look upon myself, in the capacity of a clergyman, to be one appointed  
436 by Providence for defending a post assigned me, and for gaining over as  
437 many enemies as I can. (*Prose Works* ix, p. 262)



## 10 The Grapes of Wrath and Scorn 15

438 I have got Materials Towards a Treatise proving the falsity of that  
439 Definition animal rationale, and to show it should be only *rationalis capax*.  
440 Upon this great foundation of Misanthropy (though not Timons manner)  
441 the whole building of my *Travells* is (*Swift to Pope*, 29 September 1725,  
442 *Correspondence*, II, p. 607)

443 But these edifying and moralizing intentions are also the satirist's  
444 main problem: he intends to denounce human vices, but his very  
445 denunciation is itself considered as vicious. His emotion is not appropri-  
446 ate. We have here an instance of the wrong kind of reasons problem for  
447 contempt: the satirist, by expressing his contempt for mankind, seems  
448 to be looking for *having the attitude of contempt*, and not to have what  
449 is contemptible as the proper object of his emotion. In Parfit's (2011,  
450 pp. 420–432) analysis of the wrong kind of reasons problem, the sati-  
451 rists reasons are *state given* reasons, directed *at the attitude* of contempt,  
452 and not *object given* reasons, that is reasons directed at what is worthy of  
453 contempt. Contempt based on state given reasons is a form of pretense,  
454 an emotion which is not appropriate, but phony or insincere. So the sat-  
455 irist's project seems to be faked, and hypocrite, as many critics of Swift  
456 have argued.

457 There are two dilemmas of satire, which Swift exemplifies almost par-  
458 adigmatically. The first is that the satirist can deliver his moral message  
459 only by sharing with his readers emotions, such as anger and contempt,  
460 which the readers find negative and so despise. This is also why satire,  
461 and the kind of negative feelings it expresses, often self-directed. There  
462 is a second dilemma for the satirist: his main weapons are irony and  
463 fiction, but how can these modes of expression carry the weight of his  
464 reprobation? If the satirist is understood too literally, the satire is unsuc-  
465 cessful, and if he is too ironical and too fictional, he will not be taken  
466 seriously, and will fail to deliver his moral message. The art of fiction in  
467 general requires the appropriate tuning of the emotions. This is true of  
468 satire and of the expression of contempt. The satirist is always suspected  
469 of either pretending to be contemptuous, or if he is genuinely contemp-  
470 tuous, to be immoral because he does not have the proper humility and  
471 respect for humanity which are these bases of morality. If, like Swift, he  
472 is also a Christian, his case is almost desperate.



## 16 P. Engel

473 The solution to this problem is to reject the common understanding  
474 of contempt, as a bad emotion, which involves an absence of respect  
475 toward its target, and a scorn for humanity. Swift is a misanthrope only  
476 as far as he directs his scorn toward people who are themselves vicious,  
477 and at the kind of situations that they create: political injustice in  
478 Ireland (*The Drapier* letters), famine and poverty with the children of  
479 Ireland (*A Modest Proposal*), bigotry and credulousness (*A Tale of a Tub*),  
480 false learning as with the Academy of Lagado (*Gulliver*), and all the sit-  
481 uations which are the object of his rage. So his contempt is for the right  
482 kind of reason: it is directed at real situations which exemplify moral  
483 wrongness, stupidity and vice. Swift's emotions of anger and contempt,  
484 as they are manifested in his satires, are aimed at the right targets. They  
485 are disrespectful, because in such situations, it correct, and fit, to "vex  
486 the rogues". He is clear on the fact that it does not amount to hate of  
487 mankind:

488 I tell you after all that I do not hate Mankind, it is *vous autres* who  
489 hate them because you would have them reasonable Animals, and are  
490 Angry for being disappointed. (*Swift to Pope*, 26 November 1725,  
491 *Correspondence*, III, p. 118)

492 The satirist here relies on, and displays, a form of moral knowledge.  
493 Indeed, it is disputable what this kind of knowledge amounts to. Is  
494 it, as Swift seems to imply, a knowledge of moral truths, based on  
495 acquaintance with real values, on the basis of which the emotion of  
496 contempt produces the implicit judgments of the satirist under the  
497 guise of his "mirth", as the moral realist would be tempted to say? Or  
498 does this knowledge consist in some form of understanding which  
499 falls short of being genuine knowledge (Brady 2013)? I side with the  
500 first, but indeed this claim is far from evident. A non-cognitivist about  
501 moral values and norms will claim that if there is no agreement on  
502 what the moral truths are, there cannot be moral knowledge, either in  
503 ordinary life or in its expression in satires. So the view proposed here is  
504 bound to seem question-begging. But I hope to have at least indicated  
505 how there can be *room* for a moral realistic view of the emotions of  
506 anger and contempt.



507 **Acknowledgements** Without my friends in Geneva, I wouldn't have learnt  
 508 anything about emotions. Four years ago, Patrizia Lombardo asked me to write  
 509 on contempt, but I failed to produce anything decent. Her work on these  
 510 issues, and everything that she did on literature (such as Lombardo 2014),  
 511 inspired me a lot. Thanks to Santiago Echeverri for his comments. I owe a  
 512 huge debt to Laura Candiotto, who not only organized a wonderful conference  
 513 in 2017 in Edinburgh, but also has been so generous and patient.

## 514 References

- 515 Bell, M. 2013. *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt*. Oxford:  
 516 Oxford University Press.
- 517 Brady, M. 2013. *Emotional Insight*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 518 Brogaard, B., and E. Chudnoff. 2016. Against Emotional Dogmatism.  
 519 *Philosophical Issues* 26: 59–76.
- 520 Darwall, S. 2018. Contempt as an Other-Characterizing, “Hierarchizing”  
 521 Attitude. In *The Moral Psychology of Contempt*, ed. M. Mason, 193–216.  
 522 London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- 523 Deonna, J., and F. Teroni. 2012. *The Emotions*. London: Routledge.
- 524 de Sousa, R. 1987. *The Rationality of Emotions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 525 ———. 2011. *Emotional Truth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 526 Doris, J.M. 2005. *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*.  
 527 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 528 Echeverri, S. 2017. Emotional Justification. *Philosophy and Phenomenological*  
 529 *Research*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12453>.
- 530 Gordon, R. 1987. *The Structure of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
 531 University Press.
- 532 Johnson, S. 1779. *Lives of the Poets, Selections*. Oxford: Oxford World Classics,  
 533 Oxford University Press.
- 534 Kant, E. 1785. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Timmermans.  
 535 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2012).
- 536 Leavis, F.R. 1952. The Irony of Swift. In *The Common Pursuit*. London:  
 537 Chatto & Windus.
- 538 Livet, P. 2002. *Emotions et rationalité morale*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- 539 Lombardo, P. 2014. Literature, Emotions and the Possible: Hazlitt, Stendhal.  
 540 In *Mind, Values and Metaphysics: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Kevin*  
 541 *Mulligan*, ed. A. Rebut. Berlin: Springer.



## 18 P. Engel

- 542 Mason, M. (ed.). 2018. *The Moral Psychology of Contempt*. London: Rowman **AQ6**  
543 & Littlefield.
- 544 Middleton-Murry, J. 1954. *Jonathan Swift, a Critical Biography*. London:  
545 Jonathan Cape.
- 546 Mulligan, K. 2003. From Appropriate Emotions to Values. *Monist* 81: 61–88.
- 547 Parfit, D. 2011. *On What Matters*, vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 548 Pelsler, A. 2014. Emotion, Evaluative Perception and Epistemic Justification. In  
549 *Emotion and Value*, ed. S. Roeser and C. Todd, 107–123. Oxford: Oxford  
550 University Press.
- 551 Pryor, J. 2000. The Skeptic and the Dogmatist. *Noûs* 34 (4): 517–549.
- 552 Rabinowicz, W., and T. Rønnow-Rasmussen. 2004. The Strike of the Demon:  
553 On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value. *Ethics* 114 (3): 391–423.
- 554 Rawson, C. 2014. *Swift's Angers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 555 Robinson, J. 2005. *Deeper Than Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 556 Roeser, S., and Cain Todd (eds.). 2014. *Emotion and Value*. Oxford: Oxford **AQ7**  
557 University Press.
- 558 Skorupski, J. 2010. *The Domain of Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 559 Stoker, M. 1987. Emotional Thoughts. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24:  
560 59–69.
- 561 Strawson, P.F. 1960. *Freedom and Resentment*. London: Methuen (1974).
- 562 Swift, J. 1898. *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, 12 vols, ed. Temple Scott.  
563 London: Bell & Sons.
- 564 ———. 1958. *Poems of Jonathan Swift*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., ed. Harold Williams.  
565 Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 566 ———. 1999. *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 4 vols, ed. D. Woolley. Bern:  
567 Peter Lang.
- 568 ———. [1726] 2001. *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. C. Rawson. London: Penguin  
569 Books.
- 570 ———. 2013. *Parodies, Hoaxes, and Mock Treatises*, ed V. Rumbold.  
571 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 572 Tappolet, C. 2016. *Emotions, Values and Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University  
573 Press.
- 574 Thackeray, W.F. 1854. Jonathan Swift. In *The English Humourists of the*  
575 *Eighteenth Century*. London.
- 576 Tocqueville, A. de. 1835. *De la démocratie en Amérique*. Paris. English trans. H.  
577 Reeves. 2003. *Democracy in America*. Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange.

## Author Query Form

Book ID: **461130\_1\_En**  
 Chapter No: **10**

Please ensure you fill out your response to the queries raised below and return this form along with your corrections.

Dear Author,

During the process of typesetting your chapter, the following queries have arisen. Please check your typeset proof carefully against the queries listed below and mark the necessary changes either directly on the proof/online grid or in the 'Author's response' area provided

Query Refs.	Details Required	Author's Response
AQ1	Please check and confirm if the author and the respective affiliation has been correctly identified. Amend if necessary.	
AQ2	There seems to be some text missing in the sentence '... certain attitude of -ing'. Please supply.	
AQ3	Kindly note that the citation 'Skorupski (2011)' has been changed to 'Skorupski (2010)' to match the year in the reference list. Please check here and correct if necessary.	
AQ4	Kindly note that the citation 'Livet (2001)' has been changed to 'Livet (2002)' to match the year in the reference list. Please check and correct if necessary.	
AQ5	Kindly note that the citation 'Rawson (2015)' has been changed to 'Rawson (2014)' to match the year in the reference list. Please check and correct if necessary.	
AQ6	Reference 'Mason (2018)' are given in the list but not cited in the text. Please cite in text or delete from the list.	
AQ7	Reference 'Roeser and Todd (2014)' are given in the list but not cited in the text. Please cite in text or delete from the list.	

# MARKED PROOF

## Please correct and return this set

Please use the proof correction marks shown below for all alterations and corrections. If you wish to return your proof by fax you should ensure that all amendments are written clearly in dark ink and are made well within the page margins.

<i>Instruction to printer</i>	<i>Textual mark</i>	<i>Marginal mark</i>
Leave unchanged	... under matter to remain	Ⓟ
Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin	∧	New matter followed by ∧ or ∧ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Delete	/ through single character, rule or underline or ┌───┐ through all characters to be deleted	Ⓞ or Ⓞ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)	/ through letter or ┌───┐ through characters	new character / or new characters /
Change to italics	— under matter to be changed	↵
Change to capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to small capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to bold type	~ under matter to be changed	~
Change to bold italic	≈ under matter to be changed	≈
Change to lower case	Encircle matter to be changed	≡
Change italic to upright type	(As above)	⊕
Change bold to non-bold type	(As above)	⊖
Insert 'superior' character	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ or Υ under character e.g. Υ or Υ
Insert 'inferior' character	(As above)	∧ over character e.g. ∧
Insert full stop	(As above)	⊙
Insert comma	(As above)	,
Insert single quotation marks	(As above)	Ƴ or ƴ and/or ƶ or Ʒ
Insert double quotation marks	(As above)	ƶ or Ʒ and/or ƶ or Ʒ
Insert hyphen	(As above)	⊥
Start new paragraph	┌	┌
No new paragraph	┐	┐
Transpose	└┐	└┐
Close up	linking ○ characters	Ⓞ
Insert or substitute space between characters or words	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ
Reduce space between characters or words		↑