

The modality of emotions sens dessus de Sousa

*Our runny nose, the cause of our sadness?
Our Ronnie knows the cause of this madness.*

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Abstract The issue of the phenomenology of emotion is a conceptual mess. The phenomenology of emotion, and its so called “affectivity” in particular, are widely perceived to be key to the understanding of what emotions are, and yet they are very difficult to describe. In this paper, I embrace de Sousa’s optimistic claim that we can enhance our understanding of emotional phenomenology with the help of the idea that there is an emotion ‘modality’. Following his path, I wish to argue for the following: Neither phenomenology nor relativity is incompatible with viewing emotions as importantly analogous to perceptions, in a way that supports at least a graduated claim to objectivity. (De Sousa 1987, 141). I show how difficult it is for current emotion theories to account for both the objectivity and the relativity characteristics of emotions. Emotion ‘modality’ does not seem to encompass both. And, while the modality of emotion seems to drive a wedge between emotion and perception, I argue that this is not the case. In my opinion, the modality of perception is distinct from the intentional content of perception, as well as from its phenomenology. Similarly, if the ‘modality’ of emotion is not part of the intentional content of emotion (i.e., if it is not what emotions are about or directed to), it is disconnected from emotional phenomenology. However, when the modality of emotion designates values, it is a good candidate to account for their phenomenal character. I claim that the same could be said for perceptual states.