

What “Values” Are Emotions About?

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Abstract This paper’s starting point is the popular thesis that emotions are constituted by experiences of value. This thesis raises what I call the *value question*: what exactly are these values that emotions are supposedly about. ‘Value’ here is understood broadly to include not only properties such as being good, bad, fearsome, dangerous, etc. but also being right, wrong, a reason, etc. In my view, the value question hasn’t received the concentrated attention that it deserves (though there are some notable exceptions), perhaps because it isn’t immediately clear how to adjudicate competing answers. I argue, however, that Ronald de Sousa has developed two important ideas which can help us to make progress. These two ideas are as follows: (i) emotions help to solve the “frame problem” by controlling what strikes us as salient in deliberation, and (ii) emotions are Janus-faced, looking outward toward the world and inward toward the self. Careful consideration of the value question in light of these two proposals favours the view that emotions are about the following value: the emoter’s *reasons* to do things.