Epistemic Feeling, Knowledge and Communal Ethics

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The paper outlines a twofold claim: (1) Conceptual and empirical research suggest the existence of an affective faculty that has a normative role with regard to knowledge claims; this faculty is properly called 'epistemic feeling' (EF) or 'truth-feeling' (TF); (2) Epistemic feeling is collective or shared feeling in the sense that its calibration files reflect epistemic norms that have been synchronized in shared epistemic activities. The manifestation and deliverances of epistemic feeling thus reflect not only the individual but also the communal epistemic self.

In the first section of the paper, I shall frame my topic by the assumption that attributions of knowledge of the form 'x knows that p' are a kind of credit given to epistemic subjects in virtue of their coming to believe that p in an epistemically responsible or virtuous way. I then present the claim that one of the faculties recruited by epistemically responsible agents to this purpose is affective in nature. It has the double function of evaluation and motivation: on the one hand, it assesses the processes that are belief producing, on the other hand it motivates efforts to engage in explanatory inquiry. In view of this epistemically relevant function, it is appropriate to characterize it with the functional term 'epistemic feeling'. Since there are different accounts with regard to the extension of this term I will use the more specific term 'truth-feeling' (TF) for the conception outlined here that emphasizes the normative weight of epistemic feeling.

In the second section, I will outline the principal problem for the claim that TF has normative bearing on attributions of knowledge. The problem is located in the feeling's immediacy, manifesting a mandatory emotional response to epistemically relevant input patterns. Relying on mandatory responses seems to be incompatible with a responsibilist view on knowledge which entails normative attitudes of ethical significance. In order to uphold the claim of an affective attitude that has normative power we need the feeling to be responsive to norms that it reflects.

In the third section, I will suggest a solution to the problem of the tension between immediacy and normative reflectivity. The suggestion draws, on the one hand, on a theory of emotion that allows the malleability of emotional appraisal on the basis of learning programs that refill its so called "calibration files". On the other hand, the suggestion draws on an account of shared epistemic activity that is dynamically structured and leads to synchronizing the individual attitudes and values implied in it. I assume that synchronized attitudes of this kind will function as epistemic norms transferred through learning programs into the calibration files of TF. My conclusion is that TF has built in

collectively synchronized norms allowing it to be both immediate and reflective. Construed along these lines, TF is a self-evaluative state that bears both on individual and communal self-constituents. This might explain individual discrepancies in TF's deliverances in spite of the obtaining of communal epistemic synchrony, and it might explain inter-communal differences in TF.

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Traditional epistemology explains knowledge as sufficiently justified true belief. Reliabilists claim that a belief is sufficiently justified when it is generated by processes that by default reliably lead to true beliefs. Responsibilist or Virtue Epistemology is built on the objection that the automatisms of reliable processes cannot by themselves provide the credit of knowledge. They must be supplemented by necessary conditions that bear on subjective responsibility. The motto is: "Knowledge is true belief which results from a cognitive virtue" (Greco 1993). Thus, epistemically virtuous behavior is considered to provide the added value of knowledge over true belief, so that it is a necessary and in many contexts sufficient condition for knowledge attribution if the virtue "plays a *critical* or *salient* role in getting a person to the truth, […] if it *best explains* why a person reaches the truth" (Baehr 198). Virtue Epistemology assumes that the force of epistemic virtue will rule out the imponderabilities inherent in inductive reasoning, to the effect that the involvement of virtue can justify attributions of knowledge in contexts the settings of which are not essentially probabilistic. On the other hand, the account forbids attributions of knowledge in cases where beliefs are *only* accidentally true, that is when the processes leading subject S to a true belief do not encompass any virtuous epistemic behavior on the side of S (see Greco 2004). The virtue account of epistemic credit implies epistemic agency and the essential idea of certain norms that epistemic agents must apply in order to count as virtuous epistemic agents. It also implies that epistemic agents have volitive control over belief producing processes, so that they can be praised for the choice and application of adequate epistemic methods and procedures and blamed for negligence in this respect.

A considerable problem for responsibilist accounts of epistemic warrant is that much of our cognitive and belief producing processes run unnoticed. This cognitive opacity runs counter the requirement of virtuous control. In most epistemological accounts it is admitted that to certain beliefs that just 'appear' the warrant of knowledge must be given, even if the way they are generated cannot be tracked and, consequently, cannot be evaluated. This problem can be attenuated by recurring to metacognitive abilities that are monitoring the properness of normal belief producing processes. Contemporary research on metacognition shows that at least some of the abilities to assess the truth-conduciveness of cognitive processes are affective in nature (Proust 2007)[1]. In philosophy, such a role is often attributed to 'intuition', whereas it is not so clear whether this intuitive faculty is rather perceptual or rather

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[1] According to Joëlle Proust the theory of metacognition considers the metacognitive abilities of "self-probing" (monitoring) and "post-evaluating" (control) to be the "architectural precondition for mental agency". These abilities are either related to an internalist view on self-knowledge in terms of "epistemic feelings", or to an externalist view in terms of "environmental features" and "feedback history". My assumption is that these two perspectives can be consolidated in the notion of shared feeling.

affective in nature. Besides, intuitive knowledge is often put on the same level as unquestionable truth, which adds additional theoretical ballast. An explicitly *affective* meta-cognitive faculty is stipulated by Bernard Bolzano in his *Theory of Science* (1837) where he coins the term "truth-feeling". Bolzano characterizes TF as the "faculty, to make a true judgment or …. to know the truth, without being aware of the reason for which one knows it" (ToS §316.3). In a note to §316 he even claims that the concept "designated with the word feeling is so important for logic and many another science that it is impossible to do without it" (ibid., note 1).

The important question with regard to such a stipulation is: what is the import of an affective faculty for epistemological concerns? Why should it be conceptually required that the monitoring faculty is affective in nature? To find an answer to these questions, we have to resort to emotion theory.

A major claim of all accounts of emotions is that affective states – however they are conceptualized – are evaluative and motivating states. Feeling is responsive to the valuable properties of a thing, an event or a situation; it is an appraisal of the importance of the situation for the subject and motivates her to behave correspondingly. If we claim specific epistemic relevance for an affective faculty in cases where rational justification of a belief is not open, then we claim that this assumed TF evaluates the reliability of the process or the processes generating a certain belief p in us. If the appraisal is positive it entitles to hold the belief and even may give it the credit of knowledge. The evaluative function of TF is to provide warrant for the belief. Now what about the motivating function? What could TF motivate an epistemic agent to do when it already warranted the belief in question?

The answer to that question must be a conception of knowledge that rather focuses on the ideal of explanation than on the ideal of justification. It is also a conception of knowledge that is rather processual than static. What is interesting in the first place is how good we can ground the content of a belief, not how well we are justified in holding the belief. The difference can be seen in the following example: One might be perfectly justified in believing that the atmospheric pressure today is higher than it was yesterday because one has read it off from a reliable barometer. But the fact that the barometer shows one point more today than yesterday does not explain the fact the atmospheric pressure today is higher than it was yesterday. Even if the belief that the pressure today is higher than it was yesterday gets the credit of knowledge in virtue of its being well justified, it would be more valuable to know why the content of this belief is true. Knowledge claims should not imply the closure of inquiry once the credit of justification or warrant is given. The ideal of the virtuous epistemic agent is the one who – striving for explanatory knowledge – makes efforts to go beyond justification of her beliefs. And this is in a nutshell the motivating function of TF. When the reasons for one's beliefs are opaque and TF delivers a positive appraisal of the processes that led us to these beliefs, this might be sufficient to give the credit of knowledge. But the normative task of TF is to boost inquiry into the objective grounds of what these beliefs are about, thus solidifying the value of justification through the value of explanation.

The advantage and the problem of TF both seem to be found in the feature of being mandatory. The question is whether and how the mandatory can be linked to the normative or the rationale of knowledge. This problem becomes even more urging, if, as proposed by evolutionary cognitive science, the mandatory is explained in terms of a system's adaptive responses to a specified set of environmental cues. One problem with this account is the inflexibility with regard to modifications of the environment. Once the system is conditioned to respond to a set of cues, it is doomed to do so even if these cues do not have any adaptive relevance in the new or changed environment.

Another question takes up the end of a regress problem. If TF is seen as a reliable faculty monitoring other reliable faculties and processes, what can warrant the reliability of TF? Here again, TF's being mandatory or immediate seems to be in clinch with ideals of knowledge that build on reflectivity. If we agree that "some amount of reflective knowledge or at least critical reflective awareness is a prerequisite of epistemic entitlements" (Dohrn, 121) then the deliverance of a mandatory TF cannot satisfy claims for entitlement. The fact that this crucial faculty is supposed to be affective even adds to the uneasiness. Even if one assumes that affectivity is not in principle opposed to rationality, it seems nonetheless that the relatively wide range of discrepancies in affective responsiveness to a given situation precludes a relevant or systematic role of feeling with regard to truth-conduciveness. One's feeling might be too closely related to personal factors such as subjective taste, preferences or wishful thinking to count as a guide for the normative notion of knowledge (on mismatch with environment and systematic misleading emotions see Goldie 2008). To overcome the gap between the weight of immediacy and the ideal of reflexivity it has been suggested to weaken the requirement of reflexivity in the following way:

> (CD) We are blameless in following our immediate affective valuations unless a reflective assessment of them is available (Dohrn, 114).

Principle CD weakens the requirement of reflectivity by making it conditional on its availability. But this condition just opens up a bunch of new questions related to availability. It seems more promising to strengthen the case of immediacy in order to overcome the gap between entitlement grounded on reflexivity and entitlement grounded on immediacy. Even if we agree that "reflective knowledge or at least critical reflective awareness is a prerequisite of epistemic entitlements" (Dohrn, 121), we can reasonably hold that the disjuncts 'full fledged reflective knowledge' and 'critical reflective awareness' are sufficiently different to allow the latter to include affective awareness – provided affective awareness is reflective. This is certainly the case in the construal of TF as a faculty that monitors the correctness of truth-conveying processes; TF is not directed on the propositional content of a belief that is going to be formed but on the properness of belief generating processes. Therefore it seems utterly justified to declare TF a reflective faculty that is self-evaluative. Self-reflection is a topic that is traditionally undertaken in cognitive terms such as 'self-knowledge'. This terminology bears the risk to neglect that an important part of self-reflection is evaluative and not factually informative. Feeling

guilt for having hurt one's friend is different from knowing or believing that one hurt his friend. It reflects one's doing in a different but not less distinct mode than self-directed belief. It might even be the case that only the guilt feeling leads to full reflective knowledge of what one did. So it is at least plausible to hold that affective appraisal in the form of TF can be accommodated in the Cartesian inspired claim that reflective knowledge is better than immediate knowledge. In view of the regress problem of justification it even seems preferable to resort to kinds of reflection that are not themselves cognitive/propositional in nature. But even granted the reflectivity of TF, how can we explain that it is responsive to norms that it reflects?

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In the third section, I will suggest a solution to the problem of the tension between immediacy and normative reflectivity of TF by adding a further dimension of reflectivity that draws on intersubjectivity. The idea is that TF does not only reflect on the individual epistemic performance but, in doing so, reflects on intersubjectively shared epistemic appraisal. The suggestion draws, on the one hand, on Jesse Prinz's theory of emotion as embodied appraisal.that allows the malleability of emotional appraisal on the basis of learning programs that refill its so called "calibration files". Prinz argues that emotions are representational in virtue of their tracking concerns. The so called "calibration files" are structures in long term memory that link judgments, thoughts, imaginings, or perceptual cues to the patterns of bodily changes that constitute embodied appraisals. Learning programs may tell us how to fill these files. New calibration files can be set in place by recruiting existing embodied appraisals to serve the purpose of tracking new core relational themes (quoted from Jones 19-21)). This account is taken to solve the learning problem of affective states, provided – as Karen Jones puts it - "we have the capacity to engage in good calibration file housekeeping" (Jones, 20). One of the natural learning programs for calibration files mentioned in this context is emotional contagion, which can teach children what it is appropriate to fear, to hate to be disgusted by (Jones, 20).

On the other hand, the solution strategy draws on an account of shared or communal epistemic activity that is dynamically structured and leads to synchronizing the individual attitudes and values implied in it. Communal epistemic activity is, broadly speaking, a joint endeavour of knowledge acquisition. The process of communal epistemic activity does not only enfold the gathering of information, but also deliberative acts in the aim to determine the extent of justification or warrant for knowledge. Such deliberation can be modelled as a dynamic aggregation process, in which each party's attitudes and valuations are constantly "encumbered" with those of the others. In the model case, such a process leads to the synchronization of the individual attitudes and valuations that is reached in iterated loops of converging aggregation, where each iteration is a function of one's 'allocation'-value and a value of 'competence weight' that is attributed to each other. The continuous mutual "encumbering" of attitudes and values leads to an alignment where they become "identical and symmetrical". Valuations

synchronized along these lines are rationally accepted common values that provide the community's norms for further employment. They are ethical bonds that tie epistemic virtues to a specified normative ideal that will direct epistemically appropriate thinking and behaviour and justifies reprehension in case of not following. Only results of epistemic activities that are committed to these standards merit the credit of knowledge attribution. I assume that synchronized attitudes of this kind will function as epistemic norms transferred through learning programs into the calibration files of TF. The aggregation model of epistemic norms through communal epistemic activity also fits claims of 'collective epistemology' according to which the "locus of epistemic authority and responsibility" can be distributed "within and across" collectives. The claim is explained by the fact that epistemic processes often have to be accounted for as processes of joint individual contributions. This holds especially for tasks of "procedural knowledge" or knowing how. It is assumed that the distribution of the locus of epistemic authority leads – in a first step, to reasons that become "salient from the group perspective", and, in a second step to these reasons having "immediacy" for individuals in function of their group membership.

Epistemic feeling is not an absolute standard for truth-conduciveness, and it is not infallible. A hunter-gatherer community is different from a scientific community in having different needs and motivations for knowledge, as well as different procedures to achieve and to test knowledge. Therefore, the TF of a scientist and a hunter or gatherer may deliver quite different assessments of the reliability of their belief producing processes. These differences of assessment bottom out in different decisions on the closure of inquiry. Individuals belonging to several epistemic communities may deliver a range of slightly different assessments, depending on the communal perspective they take on a certain claim. As academics, individuals may feel that certain theoretical claims are not sufficiently justified to get the credit of knowledge, while their TF toward every-day beliefs may be less rigorous. Their TF might allow them giving the credit of knowledge to a every-day belief whose evidence is very weak, while it might not license them to give this credit to a scientific belief in spite of strong evidential support. On the other hand, it also might be the case that their scientifically sharpened TF takes over to all epistemic domains of their lives, so that they apply higher standards for the credit of knowledge than other citizens do.

My conclusion is that TF has built in collectively synchronized norms allowing it to be both immediate and reflective. Construed along these lines, TF is a self-evaluative state that bears both on individual and communal self-constituents. This might explain individual discrepancies in TF's deliverances in spite of the obtaining of communal epistemic synchrony, and it might explain inter-communal differences in TF.

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