Introduction

Interpreting Reality Presupposes
an Understanding of Emotion

We are living at a time when masses of people embrace dangerous conspiracy theories by managing to allow a desire to believe something to determine the content of the belief itself. This phenomenon ebbs and flows, but in principle it is nothing new. Motivation determines selective attention, which in turn affects assessments of reality. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) highlighted, we tend to see only what we are looking for. The real question is how anyone ever avoids completely drowning in the self-deceptive pitfalls of this basic dynamic. It isn't enough merely to acknowledge the existence of such a process. We can learn a good bit about the structures of our own consciousness by understanding why this tendency surges more acutely in certain contexts than others.

But can the motivational interests that preshape our thinking in this way be treated as just one more specialized "problem area" for philosophy and psychology, an ancillary appendage subjected to previously established research methods? Or on the contrary, do our methods of understanding ourselves—and even of investigating the world we experience—already depend, at least partly, on an under-the-radar operation of motivating incentives that have already determined the focus of selective attention and inattention, the choice of methodologies, the shaping of language, and the backlog of tacit presuppositions? If we then use the resulting conceptual categories, worldviews, and methodologies to understand the value-driven processes that have already prefigured them, shouldn't we expect the outcome to be like trying to implode a building while standing on its roof?

Even in the empirical sciences—in fact, even in the neuropsychology of emotion itself—experimental operations are motivated by the researcher's theoretical and practical interests. Scientists then check to see whether the operations (that is, the scientists' own attempted actions) went as planned. Did the measurements yield the predicted outcomes, or did the world resist? That is how hypotheses are supposed to be supported or rejected. As boxers learn just as quickly, everyone has an action plan until they get punched in the mouth.

But the motivation to throw this or that punch is already presupposed before the resistance can be encountered. Twentieth-century behaviorists deliberately designed research paradigms—food pellets at the end of rats' mazes, and so on—to detect hedonistic motivations (and essentially *only* those). As a result, they failed to see that there can also be nonhedonistic ones, as psychologists now are increasingly taking into account. Ironically, the arguably nonhedonistic motivator most ignored by twentieth century psychologists was the one that drove the scientists themselves—the exploratory drive, which can't be explained by rewards or punishments other than the freedom to express the exploratory behavior itself. That view didn't fit the dominant twentieth-century theories, so the research paradigms—the rats' mazes, the reinforcement schedules, and so on—weren't designed to look for it.

In the same way, the attentional biases created by our current theoretical and practical interests may not seem obvious to us now, but at some future time they will be. Someday, graduate students will be asking "How could those primitive twenty-first century scientists have not seen XYZ?"—whatever XYZ turns out to be. And yet, even at that future time, the study of emotion and motivation still can't just proceed as a specialized practical application of presupposed scientific or philosophical beliefs and concepts because, then as now, those will have been prefigured by the motivated selective attention process itself. As hermeneutic philosophers emphasize, reality isn't just perceived; it is "interpreted" through the filter of concepts, tacit presuppositions, and research paradigms. Those are shaped by earlier selective attention, which in turn is guided by motivations.

One response to this situation might be to consider at the outset that any attempt to understand anything, including ourselves, is already a way of initiating a motivated action. The blind person's stick can reveal something of the shape of the world, but first the stick has to move. When we engage in any kind of action, whether experimentally or in everyday life, the world either resists or allows the actions; we then feel that we have learned some-

thing about the world's patterns of resistance. If the underlying motivation for action is a hammer, the world will appear as "nail" or "not-nail."

This kind of approach is now referred to as "enactivism."[1] The "en-" prefix is meant to emphasize activities that we enact from within, as opposed to direct or indirect *re*actions to external inputs (granted that this "we" was already shaped by previous interactions). If understanding begins with enactions, against which reality pushes back, then the pattern of the motivation for action will shape whatever we think or feel, depending on how reality resists our punches. The patterns of valuation that motivate actions play not only an important, but a foundational role in our view of the world. Motivation—and its experience through our emotions and values—would then need to be considered at the *beginning* of any theory of knowledge, not tacked on at the end.

How Motivation Preshapes Thinking: The Enactive Approach

The neuropsychologist Joseph LeDoux, who reputedly has a snake phobia, sometimes experiences intense fear at the sight of a stick on the ground. But it is a good thing, LeDoux emphasizes, that our emotions preshape perceptions in this way. In an interview, LeDoux remarked, "You're better off treating a stick as a snake than a snake as a stick" (Boyd 1997). Emotions motivate even perceptual activities, including the brain's imaging activities. Motivational interests, in principle, prefigure all types of cognition.

White supremacist and neo-Nazi recruits aren't just reacting to what they read on the internet. They are engaged in a lifelong, self-directed project of *seeking out* information that they hope will enable some emotionally meaningful life story to unfold—some action trajectory that they can feel has value. Propagandists understand that the most effective lie is the one the target *wants* to believe. The emotion isn't just a reaction. It seeks out avenues in the world through which the target's own imagined life trajectory, a trajectory of actions, could play out. The recruits are the agents of their own deception.

The idea of "enactivism" began to gather steam at the end of the twentieth century, when philosophers and psychologists increasingly acknowledged that they couldn't explain consciousness in terms of direct or indirect *re*actions to stimulus inputs, or even in terms of some "computational" transformation of the inputs. (By "consciousness" here, I don't mean some

complicated or "higher-order" cognitive process, but only the kind of experience that we don't seem to remember having had during a dreamless sleep.[2]) Enactivists point out that if the brain simply *reacted* to the retinal impressions from a picture of a cat, the resulting imitation of the picture in the matter that happens to be inside the head wouldn't explain how we understand the meaning of the picture or how we have consciousness of it (not just a physical replica), any more than if we were to implant a paper copy of the photograph into the brain. A photo sitting in a picture frame isn't conscious, so why should a physical replica of the picture be any more conscious than the original picture just because the replica is implanted into someone's brain matter? We can ask the same question whether the picture in the head is a static or a "moving" one.

Ancient and medieval philosophers already understood this "homunculus problem." Even if there were a tiny person inside the brain who could look at the physical picture of the cat etched in our brain matter, we would still need an even smaller person inside *that* tiny person's brain to see the smaller picture etched inside that brain, and a still smaller one to look at the picture in that even smaller brain, and so on ad infinitum. There would still be no explanation for how we become *conscious* of the picture. No matter how sophisticated the neuropsychology of the perceptual stream of inputs and subsequent reactions and computations, some additional ingredient is needed for perceptual *consciousness.*

Enactivism offers an alternative to the receiving-of-input model. What if we think of the stream running the opposite way? When we try to execute purpose-directed actions, and then the world exercises its veto power, we sense the patterns of limitation for our own organismic activity. As intelligent creatures, we can also *imagine and anticipate* the resistances we *could* encounter *if* we tried certain actions. This book will explore that dynamic as well.

Prior to understanding any particular stimulus in the world, we already know that we are trying to do something—press a car's accelerator or run a rat through a maze. As a result of our actions, we learn something about the car or the rat's behavior. But what is harder is to understand how the motivations for these actions shape our selective attention, our perception, and ultimately our worldview. For that, we would need ways to understand *why* we are trying to press the accelerator or run the rat through the maze. Only in that way can we get at the actual meaning of the motivated action trajectories that guide the interpretation of reality.

Once we have tried to act, reality is what says Yes, No, or Maybe to all our best-laid plans—an idea with roots in early phenomenology as well as pragmatism.[3] To a great extent, we understand what we see in terms of whatever facilitates or blocks our self-motivated actions. When the actions fail, the pattern of the failure is important information.

Granted, a hammer hitting our knee to evoke a simple kneejerk reaction does lead to painful consciousness, even though the pain seems to be primarily just a reaction. But even this reaction presupposes the biological purposes of the living organism, which are enactive and purposeful, not merely reactive.

Moreover, a newborn infant hit in the knee doesn't "understand" the source of the hit.[4] Knowledge of objects is acquired through a gradual development of structural engagement with the world, which depends on infantile experimentation—that is, enaction-then-resistance, not just reception of "sense data." In an experiment by Held and Hein (1963), kittens were strapped into carts pulled by other kittens. Without their own self-initiated movement, the kittens in the carts remained "functionally blind," until their release from the carts gradually allowed action-based navigation of their environment. They then encountered the pattern of resistances and affordances (see also Held and Hein 1958 on hand-eye coordination).

Our own failure to walk through a wall suggests that the wall isn't a figment of our imagination. The pattern of resistances to a hand movement makes us feel the contours of the movement's fine-grained limits and thus the shape of the resisting object. Even in visual perception, our eyes first search (an action) for the kind of imagery that we already feel is relevant to our purposes, and then our eye movements (also actions) either encounter or fail to encounter what they are looking for.

The Mack and Rock (1998) "inattentional blindness" experiments illustrate this point. Sometimes we fail to see what we were looking for, and the eyes have to look again. The pattern of the light fails to yield to the initial searching pattern. As Merleau-Ponty says, "We must look in order to see" (1945, 247). On a daily or even hourly basis, we can receive auditory inputs without *hearing* what is being said. Attention itself is something we enact, not simply a reaction. Even involuntary attention is driven by motivational concerns of the living organism.

But an even more fundamental starting point of this book is to understand how enactive motivation presupposes value. If action requires motivation, this motivation in turn assumes that we value something. The

recipient of internet disinformation is guided down the chosen rabbit holes by a valuational life plan—a long-term trajectory of action. To be sure, propagandists know how to provide the illusion of a sense of purpose. But the values that motivate the user's need for purpose, and the attitudes that determine what can count as purpose, are already there.

It follows that the enactive understanding of reality—that is, understanding grounded in the feedback from our actual or imagined actions—depends on value-laden emotions. With no valuing, there would be no enaction, as opposed to mere reaction. And with no enaction, no knowledge of the world.

The Murkiness of Motivation

The concept of self-organization makes the action-reaction distinction possible. In biological systems, the pattern of the whole doesn't simply get determined by the causal powers of the components; the reverse is also true. The system as a whole appropriates, rearranges, and constantly replaces and reproduces the micro-constituents it needs to subserve its continuing patterns of activity.[5] These dynamic patterns, and thus the resulting agent-directed selective attention, are at least as much about long-term, self-motivated action trajectories as about external events.

But understanding the ways that value and enaction shape how we see ourselves and the world is a difficult and sometimes mine-cluttered process. The meanings of the introspective feelings through which we try to discern motivation and valuation are opaque, complicated, and hard to interpret. They are seldom if ever about just what they superficially seem to be about. "Anger" "at" another motorist is more about where I'm going, why I chose to go there, and the general difficulty of ever getting anywhere (literally and figuratively) than it is about the other motorist *per se.* Those same feelings may also be about the "dark side" of human nature in general that I fantasize to be personified behind the wheel of that other car. And implicitly, I might be worried that this "dark side" also lurks within myself. An enactive approach to emotion and consciousness can offer a crucially needed perspective on the murky and complicated motivational impulses that determine how I see this or any other situation.

"Emotion" and "motivation" aren't simply synonymous, but they are intimately related. There *can* be motivation without emotion—or at least without any *conscious feeling* of emotion (paradoxically, we often don't know what we feel or we misinterpret it to ourselves). And yet our motivations

could never be consciously felt except through emotion. The motivation for action can't be logically deduced, let alone understood, merely by observing the action and without some previous understanding of what the relevant emotions "are like."

Conversely, there could be no emotion without motivation. The meaning of each emotion depends on the motivation to act.

Some would prefer to confine the term "emotion" to a short list of innate, preprogrammed responses—"basic emotions," as they are called, such as rage, fear, curiosity, nurturing, or separation distress. What I mean here needs to be broader than that if all motivation for action is to be covered. It needs to mean something as inclusive as what musicians mean by "emotion" when they speak of emotional expression in music. It *can* include items on the "basic" list (whose length has actually increased in recent research).[6] But it can also include the more nuanced, specific pang of not quite nostalgia on hearing a Chopin Ballade or the felt sense that something is "off" in a relationship. It can include a nagging feeling that I have chosen a generally bad direction for my life or that I am alienated from my culture. And it can include the curiosity or interest that determines the focus of even perceptual or scientific attention. These emotions motivate actions, which in turn determine the shape of the feedback from reality, and *vice versa.*

What makes the "basic" emotions special isn't so much their more-or-less endogenous and mutually independent status (more on that later). What is more important is that they express some of the most inevitable aspects of what is required if one is to be the kind of creature that we are. Try though we may, we can't exist other than as a conscious, self-conscious, radically finite, and necessarily interrelational form of life, and with often-frustratingly limited power and duration—including even the power to resist or escape threats to our literal survival and the need to connect with those whose interactions partly define us. These ontological necessities include inevitably emotional issues. Concerns about such inescapable parameters of our existence infect and inform the more specific feelings triggered by everyday situations in complicated ways that usually don't announce themselves in a superficial reading of an experience.

In short, feelings toward a barroom drunk are about my continuing life trajectory, not just about the drunk. Am I angry at this particular bully or at the first older boy who ever tried to bully me on the playground—or at larger facts of life that still bully me? Or are there still larger issues about why people bully each other in general? The feelings can at least partly reflect general frustrations with my ability to interact with others or sometimes

with the society and culture at large. Quite a few of these already-existing areas of concern can be found unexpectedly "underneath" the superficial reading of what a feeling is about.

The *inter*active constitution of personal identity doesn't prevent action from being self-initiated. Many enactivists also emphasize interactivity (e.g., Eugene Gendlin 2018; Anya Daly 2021; Mark Bickhard 2000; Shaun Gallagher 2020; and others who will be discussed here). To be sure, Gendlin stresses that our emotional feelings, when carefully focused on, can crucially say something about what is going on in the interpersonal environment. A teacher's feeling ill at ease in the classroom might indicate, on reflection, that a particular student is having problems outside the classroom that need attention—or that the student needs more challenge, or less. Or it may signal that some of the students are feeling confused, or simply bored.

But this interactive dimension of the meaning of an emotionally felt sense doesn't erase the fact that, as a teacher, my sensitivity to the students' needs is also intertwined with feelings about a decision I made much earlier in life, to devote a good part of my life's energy to helping educate students. The current emotion has its meaning in terms of this *overall project* and the values that originally motivated it.

Am I failing the value to which I had committed myself? Was that commitment overly simplistic to begin with? Do I lack the power and capability needed to facilitate those presumably worthwhile objectives? Can any of us ever have enough power and capability in these regards? The immediate emotion poses all those questions and more. We can separate out our specific felt sense of each of the questions and focus on them one at a time, but they all figure into the initial emotion, and their meaning depends on the larger context—the overall trajectory of action.

General underlying valuational "themes" of this kind help constitute the meaning of each seemingly discrete experience along the way. Frustration with my boss is also a frustration with the *inevitable existential fact* that "everyone has a boss"—and multiple bosses, in the important sense. When we play the game of "Ain't It Awful!" with our friends, we are acknowledging that this inescapable common theme is part of what each of us individually feels. When we lose someone to death, we also grieve the *general huge fact* that reality is such as to require the person's death—the overall theme of loss, destruction, decay, and disintegration. Everyone we have ever lost, or might lose, factors into the feeling.

When these broader "existential" themes become too troubling, we are tempted simply to repress or minimize them. But if they are actually

important underlying referents of our everyday experiences, then they surely must affect our interpretations of reality in major ways. For example, can I empathize with the plight of the poor while maintaining the illusion that I myself *have more power* in the ultimate scheme of things *than any of us ever realistically could have*—that I or anyone else, despite the facticity of circumstances, always have the power to "pull ourselves up by our boot-straps"? To be sure, we are the agents of our own action plans; but reality inevitably pushes back—for all of us.

The Problem of Consciousness

Modern psychology has tended to minimize the role of emotional *consciousness,* and in fact consciousness in general, by treating it as if it were, as Thomas Natsoulas (1993) puts it, a mere "appendage" to an underlying physical process. William James famously quipped that "We feel sorry because we cry" (1884, 190). But this clever turnabout doesn't refute the priority of emotion and motivation. We both feel sorry and cry (or choke up, or some other physical enactment)—all in one stroke, as two dimensions of the same process, whether we emphasize the "physical" or "mental" dimension.

James wants to prioritize the physical dimension. But even in that realm, *emotional* brain areas are the earliest to be activated—prior to the motor areas that would be necessary for an overt movement like crying. Emotional areas are even activated prior to the perceptual areas when the brain receives a perceptual input (for example, see Carl Aurell 1984, 1989; Antonio Damasio 1999; Jaak Panksepp 1998; Ellis 2005).[7] Regardless of how this problem of the "physical"/"mental" connection is resolved, what is clear is that voluntary actions, and even some involuntary ones (indirectly), have to be motivated. That is why we call them actions rather than just automatic reactions. The "We feel sorry because we cry" comment itself is motivated—by a desire to make the understanding of emotional conscious-ness easier than it is.

Traditionally, both empirical-scientific and philosophical approaches to motivation and emotion have tended to explain each occurring emotion primarily in relation to the external event that supposedly elicits it, as if the emotion were simply a reaction to a stimulus. As a result, each spe-cific emotion appears superficially as if it were "about" or "directed at" the specific trigger. The enactivist approach advocated in this book emphasizes the opposite directionality. As Michael Slote (2014) aptly reminds us, the

trigger is only the tip of an iceberg because emotions originate from within the intricate self-organizing process that defines a conscious and valuing creature, even though that process is also previously *inter*active.

Even grief depends on enactive understandings. Empathizing with the person is empathizing with their capacity to act. When we lose them, we feel the cancellation of their every future action. The person can never again throw a baseball, tease someone with a nickname, or walk through a door with a bottle of wine. We grieve every one of these now no-longer-possible actions. We lose all the enactions with which we had previously empathized, and all possible future ones. Staring at the "lifeless" photo, we feel the frustrated need to empathically imagine the person's actions.

I want to argue that the most basic emotions that shape our experience are *motivations for enactive processes,* and consequently they are about how we (or those with whom we empathize) could or couldn't act, including long and sometimes convoluted sequences of actions, as motivated by the meanings through which we define an ongoing action trajectory, not just a reaction to an immediate situation. This enactive sequence then shapes the feedback from worldly resistance that informs consciousness.

The implications of this point are amazingly ubiquitous. Even empirical-scientific methods with their "experimental operationalizations" (operations = actions) are a superstructure that depends on a more basic phenomenological starting point—an understanding of the motivation-action-selective-attention-then-feedback process. Phenomenology, simply put, is a philosophical and psychological discipline that doesn't simply introspect, but rather tries to refine our introspective methods to get a less superficial view of the ways in which our own presupposition-laden conscious processes inevitably affect (and somewhat distort) what we see and understand. It also acknowledges that the introspective process itself is distorted by this same interpretive problem, leading to the "hermeneutic circle"—the circular nature of self-interpretation.

Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1964) approach to science emphasizes the way theory-driven motivations prefigure the choice of experimental operations and therefore to some extent the results. Don Ihde's philosophy of technology (1998) makes this motivational dimension even more explicit. Ihde argues that we develop technologies that enable us to see primarily what the technologies were meant to look for.

For instance, consider the attempt to look for "fixes" to the problem of internet disinformation. Many internet algorithms are motivated by the designers' preference for eliciting a "Gee whiz!" response so that the user will

keep clicking and reposting. The result is an avalanche of disinformation, since false stories are more likely to seem sensational. Even if a technical fix to this problem were possible, the designers might not be sufficiently *motivated to look for it.* Or their conceptual tools may not *enable* them to look for it. A resulting consensus that no technical fix is possible would then be seriously misleading. Similarly, if researchers for a drug company are to see the negative side-effects of the company's new drug, they have to be motivated to look for them—motivated, for example, by potential lawsuits, government oversight, or ethical principles.

Since the chosen experimental operations are partly driven by selective attention (which in turn is motivated), scientific understanding is not only limited, but also somewhat distorted, to an extent that is not fully determinable. The choice of what to measure and how to measure it depends on the scientist's imagination about possible intervening variables, the choice as to which theories to test, which operational definitions to use, which research projects to pursue, and perhaps most crucial, which potentially contaminating control variables to watch out for. Science presupposes imagination at every turn.

In the study of consciousness and emotion, the misleading effects of a purely empirical approach are magnified. David Chalmers (1995) and Joseph Levine (1983) have demonstrated clearly why we can't explain consciousness just by means of empirical knowledge about the brain. The fact that consciousness correlates with a certain brain process can never explain, even in principle, *why* it correlates with certain kinds of physical processes, and not with others. This "hard problem of consciousness" (Chalmers) or "explanatory gap" (Levine) isn't resolvable by empirical methods.

But that doesn't mean the study of consciousness should just write off the empirical methods. Science is an extension of ordinary enaction followed by pushback in the attempt to organize the realm of phenomena—things as they "appear" in the sense that they can and can't be affected by us. Scientists are routinely "punched in the mouth" by reality as their experimental operations fail. As Gene Gendlin was fond of remarking, we all depend on the science of aeronautics when we fly to our conferences. Consciousness is embodied in a world not dictated by our subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty too shows that the empirical sciences can help with understanding our motivated engagements with the world, if science is taken as an extension of the everyday process of action then resistance, guided by admittedly motivated selective attention.[8] Phenomenologists often refer to this world understood through action then resistance as the "life world" (e.g., Husserl 1936/1970).

Looking at a few crucial things about the brain's workings can be suggestive and potentially helpful. In this book, I use phenomenological methods—especially Gendlin's "focusing" method—but with some relevant ideas from recent research on the emotional brain. This research is increasingly consistent with an enactive view of how consciousness and emotion work. In his later philosophical works, Gendlin took an explicitly enactivist position (Gendlin 2017, 2018).

The central point I will try to make is that focusing carefully on any particular experiential event, if pursued down to its bottom level—the level of motivated attention and inattention—leads in the direction of concerns and values common to conscious and thinking creatures as such, and involving what existentialists have called the "meaning" of our values and actions. In Heidegger's terms, some of these emotional themes can even reflect "ontological" features of our form of being—themes that are inevitable aspects of what it means to be the kind of being that we are. The fact that "everyone has multiple bosses" reflects an existential theme—and to some extent an "ontological" one[9]—that affects everyone's emotions, given our inevitable interdependence. Even emotions about contingent situations—for example, antisemitism, homophobia, racism or sexism—also arise from the broad existential themes of alienation, the finiteness of personal power and significance, and the inescapable dependence on social relatedness.

There is never any apodictic certainty with these themes. We always discover more and more layers of meaning, and we often need to revise our previous understandings of a given "felt sense" in any specific context. But dispelling unwarranted presuppositions about what emotional feelings are "supposed to mean," or what they have typically been assumed to be "about," already moves us closer to their truth than we were before.

I will show that this focusing process is motivated by one of our most important driving emotions—the exploratory drive—which can be experienced subjectively, and its empirical correlates can also be found if we look. The exploratory drive motivates the attempt to understand our world, as it does for any cat or dog. For humans, it automatically puts into play a searching process that makes us want to prevent the reality of what our own emotions are about from remaining completely hidden. Yet we are simultaneously driven by competing emotions that can make us prefer not to know. These inner conflicts are always at play.

The reality that we try to understand in this book includes the most basic value-action directions that are always presupposed by any immediate "response." To understand the fundamental value issues at the bottom of

the enactive process, we have to begin by studying motivation and emotion. As Frank Jackson (1986) famously argued, a scientist observing someone's brain can't know what the person feels unless the scientist already knows something of what such emotions "are like." The scientist would have to rely on earlier correlational studies, but those correlations themselves would already have depended on previous understanding of that with which the observable brain processes were being correlated—that is, the subjective feelings. The more flawed our methods of emotional reflection are, the more we end up with distorted ideas not only regarding what the emotions are really about, but also the meaning of our ongoing action trajectories, and in some cases why there is a shortage of meaning.

These enactive meanings can be both negative and positive. I will argue that the positive ones are needed to inspire action at the most basic level. The resulting value systems include but aren't limited to the long chains of "instrumentalities"—means toward other ends—that take up most of our attention.

So much energy is taken up with these instrumentalities that the experience of the more fundamental values that motivate the actions tends to get buried by the mountains of instrumentalities. The long chains of instrumental actions needed for a legislator to achieve a valued outcome might occlude or even contradict the original values toward which those outcomes were supposed to have been instrumental. Voters too might forget the original values that led to the long chains of instrumentalities that superficially *seem* to be what their political sentiments are about.

At the same time, we also can't avoid the fact that meaningful trajectory requires defining meaning in terms of the instrumentalities as well. In the lived world, the most basic values require instrumental ones in their service. We can't understand the structures of value that define these complexities in an action trajectory unless we can go beyond simply noting which concurrent event happens to have triggered a particular emotion.

Emotion is sometimes relegated to the status of a vestige from a more primitive stage of evolution. But can the elaborate growth of the prefrontal cortex now allow us to guide our lives with cognitive, rational thought, while begrudgingly placating the pesky remnants of that earlier stage of development? That view is already completely refuted by what we have said so far. Rational methods can help with constructing instrumental paths that presumably are meant to serve some purpose; but without motivation they can't provide the purposes themselves nor inspire us to pursue any purpose. And as the above observations suggest, rationality itself depends on emotion.

With no emotion, which reflects motivation, there is no purpose—hence no action and no enactive understanding of reality.

This last point doesn't make values into arbitrary emotional whims. The exploratory drive—an emotion system—makes us curious to know the truth (as best we can), aside from any ulterior rewards or punishments. Mounting evidence suggests that the exploratory drive operates independently of any emotional concern other than the inspiration to explore *per se* (e.g., Jaak Panksepp 1996, chapter 8; Ellis 2005, 2018; Davis and Panksepp 2018; Robert White 1959). But this exploratory motivation—this endogenous "love of truth," as David Hume (1740) called it—is in conflict with other emotions, and the study of emotion is needed to explore these inner conflicts as well.

This book tries to get at the bottom level of enactive meaning, the level at which our already ongoing emotional purposes define the meaning of what we are trying to do at each moment in the trajectory of our lives. The sequence in which this underlying trajectory directs selective attention then determines the contours of our perception of reality.

Philosophical and literary hermeneutics, the study of how we interpret the world—including our culture and literature—requires focusing on these underlying motivational meanings. Most crucially of all, if a relatively independent exploratory drive weren't one of our emotion systems, reality itself could be completely reinterpreted and misrepresented in the service of other emotions—as in the case of the Q-Anon and other elaborate conspiracy theories that spread through social media. Investigating the inner emotional conflicts in play here is fundamental to any hope for sorting truth from fantasy in any arena. Whether our interest is in epistemology, the social sciences, literary criticism, psychotherapy, fundamental ontology, the philosophy of science, cognitive theory, the understanding of consciousness, or even cultural studies and political philosophy, the study of emotion and motivation needs to be at the center of what we do.

I freely admit that beginning with emotion doesn't mean there aren't still problems with the "hermeneutic circle"—the circularity of self-interpretation. If we interpret reality through distorted lenses, we can't correct the distortions simply by self-reflection, which passes through the same distorted lenses. This circularity problem has to be posed for any theory of knowledge. Like anyone else, we will need to address the hermeneutic circle in this book. The point for now is that emotion needs to be taken into account at the most foundational level of any attempt to understand the world and ourselves, especially including all the disciplines just mentioned.