What Evokes Being Moved?

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Abstract

Recent attempts to define being moved have difficulties agreeing on its eliciting conditions. The status quaestionis is often summarized as a question of whether the emotion is evoked by exemplifications of a wide range of positive core values or a more restricted set of values associated with attachment. This conclusion is premature. Study participants associate being moved with interactions with their loved ones not merely for what they exemplify but also for their affective bond to them. Being moved is elicited when we apprehend the value of entities to which we are connected through basic as well as extended forms of affiliative attachment. These comprise people, certain objects, and even abstract entities, including the unshakable life-guiding ideas we call “core values.”

Keywords
being moved, core values, elevation, extended attachment, kama muta

Introduction

Recent years have seen several attempts to demonstrate that we find a distinct emotion with an identifiable pattern of components in different parts of the world and throughout history, which speakers of English sometimes—but neither always nor exclusively—refer to when declaring that they are “moved” or “touched” (see the recent comprehensive review of this literature by Zickfeld, Schubert, Seibt, & Fiske, 2019). Admittedly, the English expression is highly ambiguous. When we say that we are moved to tears, pity, indignation, desire, excitement, or some action, we evidently refer to a wide range of different reactions. Attested phrases like “deeply moved and disgusted,” “profoundly moved and horrified,” “moved with indignation,” “moved and happy,” “moved and troubled,” and “moved and inspired” also demonstrate that the expression sometimes functions as a generic label for widely disparate strong emotional experiences. However, a growing number of philosophers, psychologists, literary scholars, linguists, and anthropologists (e.g., Cova & Deonna, 2014; Deonna, 2011; Fiske, Schubert, & Seibt, 2017; Frijda, 1988; Menninghaus et al., 2015; Tan, 2009; Tokaji, 2003) have asserted and presented ample evidence to suggest that in many instances we have something specific in mind when we report that we were “moved” on some occasion and recall a warm sensation of smiling through tears when experiencing, for example:

- A brother’s wedding.
- A daughter’s graduation.
- A mother’s funeral.
- An award ceremony or surprise party in one’s honor.
- A welcome marriage proposal.
- A stoic meditation on someone’s impending death, free from self-pity.
- A sad or happy reunion or separation of friends, relatives, or lovers.
- A father forgiving and embracing his son’s murderer in court.
- Victory or success against all odds or dignity in defeat.
- Perseverance in the face of catastrophe, illness, or oppression.
- The sacrifice of a knight for his king.
- A passionate oration about solidarity, equality, freedom, or tradition at a political rally.
- The end of a sentimental tearjerker.
- Overwhelming beauty in art and nature.

These researchers agree on the need to develop a construct to capture a distinct emotion evoked in all of these situations: being moved, italicized in this article in order to distinguish it from the ambiguous vernacular expression. However, it has
proven difficult to reach an agreement on how to characterize the common denominator of the scenarios in which it is evoked, such as those listed before. Therefore, my aim here is to examine more closely the three most recent suggestions along with the arguments and observations on which they rest and the challenges they face. In the end, I will offer a fourth alternative that I believe better accommodates the intuitions and empirical data collected by these groups of researchers. I should stress that I do not aspire to do justice to the full extent of previous theoretical and empirical research on being moved, but rather focus narrowly on the question of eliciting conditions.

Hypothesis 1: Core-Value Goodness

Cova and Deonna (2014) adhere to the philosophical position that there is a property common to all objects that evoke the same emotion: offensiveness is common to all objects causing anger, danger to all objects causing fear, and so on. Anger takes many different particular objects, but always the same “formal object”: offensiveness. So, what is the formal object of being moved? Based on introspection and an interpretation of the results of an Internet-based survey with English-speaking participants, they conclude that the formal object of being moved is instantiation of “positive core values standing out in the circumstances triggering the emotion” (2014, pp. 454–455). By “core values” they refer to values that a community “treats as possessing ‘transcendental significance,’ which preclude comparisons, trade-offs, or indeed any mingling with more mundane values” (2014, p. 454). This means that something evokes being moved insofar as it saliently exemplifies particular values that we consider to be of fundamental importance to who we are, for example, brotherhood, solidarity, peace, health, virtuosity, beauty, and so on. At weddings we are moved because we perceive (among other things) a manifestation of romantic love; at political rallies we are moved by passionate orations; when witnessing a reunion of two siblings we are moved by the example of familial love; when watching a movie about a struggle against oppression, we are moved by perseverance, success, or dignity in defeat.

Cova, Deonna, and Sander (2017) went on to speak of “any positive value [members of a given community] deem important” (p. 361) and “values that are important enough to make human life meaningful” (p. 362). They also noted that the emotion previously defined as elevation, “triggered by witnessing acts of human moral beauty or virtue” (Haidt, 2000, p. 1; cf. Thomson & Siegel, 2017), represents a subtype of being moved. Deonna (2018) later slightly modified the original formulation and argued that the formal object of being moved is “the positivity or goodness of a specific core positive value’s presence” (p. 63). This revision sidesteps an objection that could be raised against the wording in Cova and Deonna (2014). If the formal object of being moved is instantiation of a core value, we end up with two emotions ascribing the same property to the same particular object in cases such as generosity: both gratitude and being moved. If, on the other hand, the formal object of being moved is the positivity of an instantiated core value, gratitude implicitly ascribes generosity to a gift, and being moved ascribes goodness or positivity to the generosity of the gift.

To conclude, a first hypothesis states that what unites objects that evoke being moved is core-value goodness.

Hypothesis 2: Mixed Feelings With Bearing on Attachment-Related Issues or Related Values

Kuehnast, Wagner, Wassiliwizky, Jacobsen, and Menninghaus (2014) conducted a free word-association study with 610 native German speakers in Berlin. When interpreting the data, they observed that the words bewegend/bewegt, berührend/berührt, rührend/gerührt, and ergreifend/egriffen were predominantly and consistently associated with words meaning “joy” and sadness, as well as a set of words describing certain situations, especially “catastrophe,” “death,” “children,” “family,” “relationship,” and “birth.” Based on these responses, they suggested that “episodes of being moved are experienced as particularly significant, or meaningful, emotional episodes of a joyful and/or sad type” (Kuehnast et al., 2014, p. 8). This meaningfulness depends on two conditions: the episodes involve “critical life and significant relationship events” and “prosocial feelings of bonding, attachment, and empathy” (Kuehnast et al., 2014, p. 8). Menninghaus et al. (2015) developed this suggestion in a study where they asked their participants to recall a bewegend, rührend, or berührend event and describe it in a few sentences. They found that most of their answers could be categorized as either relationship, critical life, political, nature-related, or art-related events, and concluded that,

Episodes of being moved are intensely felt responses to scenarios that have a particularly strong bearing on attachment-related issues—and hence on prosocial bonding tendencies, norms, and ideals—ranging from the innermost circle of one’s personal life (spouse, children, friends) to higher-order entities of social life (one’s country, social and religious communities). (Menninghaus et al., 2015, p. 12)

Hence, they call being moved an “attachment emotion” (Menninghaus et al., 2015, p. 8). In cases where we find it evoked by manifestations of “norms and ideals” like generosity, this is not because generosity represents any positive core value but one directly connected to affiliative bonds, such as helpfulness, empathy, and generosity (2015, p. 8). They also emphasize that study participants rated episodes of being moved as both pleasant and unpleasant and distinguished between being joyfully moved (where positive affect is rated higher than negative) and being sadly moved (where negative affect is rated higher than positive; 2015, p. 10). In later studies, physiological correlates of both positive and negative affect were observed when study participants were exposed to film clips and poems that elicited tears and gooseflesh (Wassiliwizky, Jacobsen, Heinrich, Schneiderbauer, & Menninghaus, 2017; Wassiliwizky, Koelsch, Wagner, Jacobsen, & Menninghaus, 2017). Menninghaus et al. (2015, pp. 10–11) argue that being moved is a mixed emotion not only in respect to
phenomenology and physiology but also in respect to elicitation. For instance, at funerals we feel sadness for the loss but also joy at the memory of what has been lost; likewise, at reunions we feel joy for what has been gained but also sadness at the memory of the prior period of separation. They regard this mixture of positivity and negativity an integral part of being moved and its eliciting conditions (see also Deonna, 2011, pp. 118–124).

To conclude, a second hypothesis states that what unites objects that evoke being moved is capacity to coactivate negative and positive emotions in different proportions, provided that some of these ingredients have a strong bearing on attachment-related issues, including norms and ideals (or values) that are directly connected with such issues.

**Hypothesis 3: Intensification of Communal Sharing**

A team of researchers based in Oslo and Los Angeles ground their hypothesis for what evokes being moved (they call it “kama muta”) in relational models theory, which was pioneered by a member of the group, psychological anthropologist Alan Page Fiske (1992). This theory posits a set of innate elementary mental models of human relations: communal sharing (two or more people have something in common, be it ideology, blood, nation, or favorite football team), authority ranking (they are arranged into a hierarchy), equality matching (they strive to achieve and maintain an even balance among them), and market pricing (they use scales and ratios in exchanges with one another). Fiske et al. (2017) argue that being moved is the emotion we feel when communal sharing relationships are intensified. This can occur in many ways and in the first, second, and third person: when we remember or see a picture of a loved one, when we experience a warm welcome by another person, or when we witness a reunion between two people.

Fiske, Seibt, and Schubert (2019) argue that this hypothesis best predicts what they found when interpreting historical and ethnological records, Internet blogs, unpublished diary studies, and a host of other sources. They have also conducted experiments asking participants to either recall “positive tears” or see short video clips with background music that circulate on the Internet and are regularly praised as “moving,” “heartwarming,” or “touching.” These depict, for instance, surprising reciprocations of acts of kindness, marriage proposals, reunions of former lovers, moments of silence honoring victims of terrorist attacks, and people singing the national anthem. Schubert, Zickfeld, Seibt, and Fiske (2016) found that participants’ ratings of “being moved,” shedding tears, feeling warm, and experiencing goose bumps correlate with their ratings of perceived closeness to and between the individuals appearing on screen. Seibt et al. (2018) carried out similar studies with U.S., Norwegian, Chinese, Portuguese, and Israeli samples. Zickfeld et al. (2018) replicated the video clip results in eight additional countries.

Seibt, Schubert, Zickfeld, and Fiske (2017) also found that participants’ ratings of actions in a scenario as “morally or ethically very right” correlate with being moved. From these results they concluded that “the main triggers of being moved are interpersonal closeness and morality” (p. 4). These two themes, they argue, are linked by communal sharing, since each of the four relational models form the basis for a particular kind of “moral motive.” This means that being moved will only be evoked by a value if it relates to the “moral motive” that Rai and Fiske (2011, pp. 61–63) pair with communal sharing relationships, which they call “Unity,” “caring for and supporting the integrity of in-groups through a sense of collective responsibility and common fate” (p. 61).

To conclude, a third hypothesis states that what unites objects that evoke being moved is intensification of communal sharing relationships, including values directly connected to such relationships. The main difference in respect to Hypothesis 2 besides conceptual framework is that Hypothesis 3 does not stipulate that the combination of positive and negative elements is a necessary condition.

**Challenges Facing Hypotheses 2 and 3**

The researchers involved in this debate seem to agree on how to characterize the present status questionis. On the one side, Cova et al. (2017) characterize Hypotheses 2 and 3 as “‘restricted-list’ approaches.” On the other hand, Menninghaus et al. (2015, p. 8) argue that “the norm- and ideal-related implications of being moved do not bear on a widely unspecified range of ‘positive core values.’” How limited is the range of values that evoke being moved? At first blush, this dilemma might seem rather easy to adjudicate empirically. If we find that being moved is elicited when test subjects apprehend values that are neither related to attachment issues nor grounded in communal sharing (e.g., individual success, willpower, perseverance, or aesthetic beauty), the core-value hypothesis must be the right way to go. According to this line of reasoning, Strick and van Soolingen (2018) conducted an experiment to determine whether manifestations of willpower and beauty are moving in the same way as love. They found this to be the case, although they report that stimuli exemplifying love admittedly elicited stronger reactions compared to stimuli exemplifying the two other values under consideration. Similar results are reported by Landmann, Cova, and Hess (2019), who suggest that the reason why relationships were more moving than success was that prosocial values usually rank higher on people’s hierarchies of values (p. 18). We might also recall that Menninghaus et al. (2015) received answers mentioning the “experience and beauty of nature” and “success and failure.” Furthermore, while it is easy to see the connection to communal sharing in many of the videos used by Schubert et al. (2016), some of them appear to focus on struggles for success, the need to believe in oneself, or dignity in defeat. When study participants reported that they felt close to the persons in these videos, it is not clear that this is a cause and not a consequence of being moved. Moreover, it is conceivable that values related to the other three relational models can evoke being moved. Reunions of soldiers and children or even soldiers and dogs are particularly common in YouTube tearjerkers. It is possible that the notion of unwavering loyalty that is strongly associated with such characters contributes to
eliciting being moved, a value that seems attributable to authority ranking. We can also imagine that orations about the importance of equality, attributable to equality matching, can elicit being moved. Even economic reciprocation, especially when it is well deserved and long overdue, seems to evoke being moved. Among the videos used by Schubert et al. (2016) we find a clip depicting a young boy who gets bailed out by a cook after stealing medicine for his mother. Years later, the cook needs expensive surgery and is forced to put his shop up for sale. But when the medical bill arrives it states that “all expenses were paid 30 years ago.” The poor boy has grown up to become a doctor and is now “repaying” the favor (market pricing).

To conclude, the challenge facing the theories that being moved is evoked by “attachment-related issues” and “intensifications of communal sharing,” or values directly related to each of these, is to demonstrate that it is not evoked under other circumstances. The results reported by Strick and van Soolingen (2018) as well as Landmann et al. (2019) suggest that this will prove difficult.

Challenges Facing Hypothesis 1

One strategy to challenge Cova and Deonna’s (2014) hypothesis could be to list core values that do not evoke being moved, preferably core values unrelated to attachment issues or communal sharing. The only attempt I find in the literature is when Menninghaus et al. (2015) mention sexual love. However, the term “core value” does not refer to any particularly strong value, but to a specific kind of value. The hedonic and/or reproductive value of sex may be strong but it is not necessarily a “core value,” at least not in many Western societies today with their specific ideology of sex rooted in centuries of Christian religious authority. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 does not necessarily predict that sexual love will elicit being moved, at least not in a cultural configuration such as ours. However, we should be careful not to deny categorically that sex could have been a core value for, for instance, the ancient Greek worshipper of Aphrodite or Eros, and consequently that it could have evoked being moved in this context.

Intuitively, it seems difficult to imagine a person not experiencing being moved when she suddenly apprehends a manifestation of the goodness of a fundamental principle by which she lives her life, and Strick and van Soolingen (2018) as well as Landmann et al. (2019) offer some empirical confirmation of this. Does this mean that we are left with the core-value hypothesis as our only option? I think not. The problem is that the characterization of the status quaestionis as a choice between a broader and a narrower thesis is not necessarily correct. Cova et al. (2017) slightly misinterpret their opponents when they claim that their view is that “only values that are relevant to social bonds are likely to move us” (p. 361). In fact, Menninghaus et al. (2015) conclude from their extensive studies that what evokes being moved is primarily attachment-related issues and secondarily “norms and ideals” (or values) relevant to social bonds. Likewise, Seibt et al. (2017) primarily refer to closeness and secondarily to values grounded in communal sharing. Based on study participants’ accounts of “positive tears,” they also stress that being moved can be an immediate reaction to another person, for example, seeing a cute infant sleeping or nostalgically remembering one’s first love. As Seibt et al. (2017, p. 420) put it, “[r]ather than any specific deed, the affection itself in the perceiver seems to evoke the feeling in these cases.” Attachment is also stressed in previous thought on the emotion. Frijda (1988, p. 350) notes that “[l]atent attachment concerns are awakened,” and Tan (2009, p. 74) posits that being moved is evoked when “Something very dear to you makes its appearance.” Can concrete people, things, and places evoke being moved without exemplifying the abstract life-guiding ideas or principles that we label “core values”? This is at least a possible interpretation of the data at hand, and we should consider it as an option. If a father cannot check the flow of tears when rising to speak at his daughter’s wedding, is he exclusively reacting to the goodness of parenthood and romantic love? The fact that he loves his daughter seems to contribute to the elicitation in a crucial way. When a surprise party is thrown in one’s honor, is being moved elicited by the goodness of friendship and generosity, or by the overwhelming affirmation of a special bond between the subject and a very specific group of people? When your daughter bursts out through the door of her kindergarten with a rough drawing of the two of you in her hands, is being moved strictly a reaction to the way in which the situation exemplifies values related to children, learning, or parenthood? The fact that it is your daughter seems to be a decisive factor. And when we hold our child for the first time, is being moved exclusively evoked by the goodness of some core value? Is it not, at least partially, a reaction to the goodness of the child itself, this intensely valuable little thing that we would do anything for?

To conclude, a challenge facing the core-value-goodness hypothesis is to demonstrate that being moved never implicitly ascribes a property directly to a person, object, or place for what they mean to the perceiving subject, but only for the core values they instantiate. To be clear, the core-value-goodness hypothesis entails that the formal object of being moved is the goodness of a value exemplified by a particular object. But can the goodness of a particular object elicit being moved without an intervening core value? Compare this to anger. You can be angered by the offensiveness of a value (e.g., authoritarianism) exemplified by a person or artwork, but you can also be angered by the offensiveness of a person. Is it the same with being moved? Can it also, given the right conditions, be evoked by looking into the eyes of your child or father because of your affection for them, not because they embody familial love or parental responsibility?

Hypothesis 4: Basic and Extended Attachment

I submit that what evokes being moved is the apprehension of something—be it concrete living beings, objects and places, or abstract ideas—as inestimably dear to the subject in the sense that he or she has a particular kind of attachment to it. The “formal object” or “core relational theme” of the emotion—that is, the property in virtue of which something elicits being moved—
is dearness. We are moved by something when we perceive its dearness, or when we perceive the dearness of an idea that it manifests. In the case of children, parents, siblings, and friends, we ascribe a value to them which—unlike economic, instrumental, or hedonic value—renders them radically irreplaceable. However, we also do this with larger social entities, certain objects like wedding rings, “invaluable” artworks, or our childhood homes. We do not apprehend this value in everyday situations but only when our attention is drawn to it, often in precarious situations: when the lives of loved ones are threatened by some serious disease, when we imagine losing them, or even after we have lost them (cf. Butler, 2009, pp. 14–16, on “grievability” and the apprehension of a life as valuable). This is also the case with what Cova and Deonna (2014) call “core values”: they are values that a community “treats as possessing transcendental significance,” which preclude comparisons, trade-offs, or indeed any mingling with more mundane values (p. 454). As they point out, we usually do not apprehend how much these values matter to us until something that instantiates them is threatened, triumphs over adversity, or succumbs to destruction, for example, when a heroic freedom fighter struggles, prevails against all odds, or is brought low by oppression (Cova & Deonna, 2014, pp. 453–455; see also Deonna, 2011; Strick & van Soolingen, 2017, p. 6). In this way, we can conceive of being moved as an attachment emotion and still predict that it will be evoked by manifestations of “core values” or ideas that are neither suggestive of, nor conducive to, social bonding. We are moved by scenarios that embody perseverance, willpower, and beauty not because the descriptive component of these thick concepts has anything to do with relationships, but because we have a relationship with them: we love perseverance, willpower, and beauty. Our relationships with such ideas are enduring and similar to interpersonal bonds. We have a benevolent disposition towards them, we experience other-praising and other-suffering emotions in respect to them, and they support a feeling of belongingness. My belief in solidarity contributes to making me who I am (see Hitlin, 2003), but so do the people, countries, and even the types of music that I am fond of. When we betray a friend, or an idea like solidarity, we feel guilt; when our friend dies, when we see the Notre Dame in flames, or when we read about the death of a stranger who exemplifies solidarity, we are sad.

The case for “extended attachment” has previously been argued by Moll and de Oliveira-Souza (2009) based on interpretations of neuroimaging and lesion studies. They postulate “that ancient mechanisms supporting basic forms of attachment in other species, such as pair-bonding . . . evolved to enable the unique human ability to attach to cultural objects and abstract ideas” (p. 69). This, they argue, provides “the affective-motivational ‘glue’ that binds people to values and beliefs” (Moll, Zahn, & de Oliveira-Souza, 2016, p. 124). This should not be taken to mean that all our value commitments can and should be reduced to extended attachment. For instance, fear of punishment or desire for personal economic stability can motivate us to embrace a principle like “justice.” However, in addition to such motivations, we can also become deeply committed to the idea of justice and form a bond of almost unconditional devotion to it that displays similarities to maternal, paternal, filial, fraternal, or conjugal affection (see Moll & de Oliveira-Souza, 2009, p. 80). Only under that condition, I submit, will a value like justice evoke being moved.

In real life, we rarely have strong experiences of being moved evoked by elicitors of the concrete or abstract kind alone, but they both tend to co-occur in a mutually reinforcing blend. Consider the following account by a Swedish middle-aged man in the 1980s reported by the music psychologist Alf Gabrielsson (2011, p. 281):

My [maternal] grandfather was to be buried. I was very sad. Tear-filled eyes and a lump in my throat. Everybody round about was very affected and there was a lot of sniffing. Candles. Me and my siblings had all been baptized in this church. Grandma and my father were buried here. Dad and Mum had got married here. So this church was right at the core of the big events of our lives.

The piece was “Solveig’s song” from Peer Gynt by Grieg. Played on the church organ and viola. Under normal circumstances I think the piece is beautiful but now it became painfully beautiful. I died there in that church pew. The very combination of organ and viola did an awful lot. You couldn’t defend yourself against them. The viola voice went right into my heart. Simply wanted to get up and bawl.

Luckily the piece isn’t so long and I survived, but I have an ambivalent relationship with it now. When I hear it today it moves me and makes me happy in a melancholy way, but I’m also afraid of what it can do to me; it hurts.

This reflection focuses on attachments to people (his grandfather, his family), places (his church), and ideas including the beauty of the atmosphere, the “painfully beautiful” music, familial love, and tradition. The same could be said about other paradigm scenarios designed to evoke being moved in our culture. In a modern Western wedding ceremony, the minister might deliver a beautiful sermon about love; dear people sit in the audience and stand before the altar; the atmosphere and their dress embody ideas like dignity, purity, and tradition; you recall childhood memories from the same church room, and so on. The experience combines multiple perceptions, memories, and reflections about people, things, and ideas that the subject holds dear. The same holds true for the “touching” video clips used by Seibt et al. (2017). For instance, one video showed when British athlete Derek Redmond tore his hamstring in the 400 meters semifinal at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. After the fall, he stands up again and, despite intense pain, continues the race limping while the other runners pass him by. Soon a man breaks through security; it turns out to be his father. Redmond cries on his father’s shoulder as he is helped to reach the finish line. The piece was “Solveig’s song” from Peer Gynt by Grieg. Played on the church organ and viola. Under normal circumstances I think the piece is beautiful but now it became painfully beautiful. I died there in that church pew. The very combination of organ and viola did an awful lot. You couldn’t defend yourself against them. The viola voice went right into my heart. Simply wanted to get up and bawl.

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defeat. Even a single cultural object, a flag, evokes being moved in a patriot, not only by symbolizing concrete entities (the land and the people he feels belonging with) but also more abstract entities (core values associated with this nation, such as liberty and the very idea of patriotism). This matches Strick and van Soolingen’s (2018) and Landmann et al.’s (2019) observation that manifestations of love and relationships elicited a stronger being moved reaction compared to manifestations of willpower or beauty. The reason might be not only that prosocial values are higher on people’s hierarchies of values, as Landmann et al. (2019, p. 18) suggest, but also that concrete attachment scenarios, combined with abstract ideas that we are attached to, both elicit the same kind of affective response.

Why do many scenarios typically associated with being moved involve negative elements? I concur with Cova et al. (2017, p. 359) that this is not because sadness is somehow an indispensable subcomponent of being moved, but rather because precarious circumstances and bereavement are superlatively effective means to make us apprehend the value of what we would otherwise take for granted. When your mother reveals that she is terminally ill, when the Notre Dame is burning, or when you see a documentary about a freedom fighter’s struggle against oppression, your latent attachment to this person/building/principle is rekindled, lacing your sadness or utter desperation with being moved, like a silver lining to a dark cloud. However, purely positive occasions, such as a wedding proposal or a surprise party in one’s honor, can also evoke this emotion (cf. Deonna, 2018, p. 63). The claim by Menninghaus et al. (2017, p. 47) that even in these scenarios there might be a faint awareness of previous anxieties about social isolation is well taken; yet, this thought experiment would work with many emotions elicited by positive stimuli. The joy that occurs when an event is conducive to one’s goals is difficult to separate entirely from fears that those goals might not be attained. Think of the mixture of fear, joy, and relief that a parent feels when recovering their toddler who has wandered off in a large department store. In this situation, fear is a precondition for joy and relief, but it does not make it a subcomponent of the latter emotions (see Cova et al. 2017, p. 359). Furthermore, the proponents of the view that a mixture of negative and positive elements is necessary to elicit being moved will often refer to studies that observed subjectively reported and physiologically measured online coactivation of negative and positive affect in moments of tears and gooseflesh when study participants watched movies or read poems (Menninghaus et al., 2017, p. 48; Wassiliwizky, Jacobsen, et al., 2017; Wassiliwizky, Koelsch, et al., 2017). However, it is crucial to separate the question of eliciting conditions from the question of what it feels like to experience being moved and the physiological changes we undergo. First of all, as previously mentioned, it should be expected that being moved will often accompany distress and sadness, especially when elicited by art and entertainment. Secondly, even in cases where being moved is elicited by apprehension of something dear to us without a clear negative background (e.g., a wedding marriage proposal), the loss of autonomy and control as well as the potentially embarrassing exposure of one’s deepest attachments might not always be a wholly pleasant experience.

To conclude, I hypothesize that being moved is elicited by what is inestimably dear to the subject, be it a person, an object, a place, or a manifestation of an unshakable principle that makes life worth living. At least in paradigm scenarios of being moved in modern Western cultures, more than one of these are usually present. To Menninghaus et al. (2015) I grant that being moved is an attachment emotion, but on the condition that it can also be evoked by manifestations of values that are not necessarily limited to prosocial norms and self-ideals, but any value that the subject is committed to through the extended form of attachment described by Moll and de Oliveira-Souza (2009). To Fiske et al. (2017) I grant that what they define as “intensifications of communal sharing” will always evoke being moved, but so will manifestations of core values, not because they relate to the moral motive called “Unity” in the model they advocate but, again, because the subject is committed to them by the same affective-motivational “glue” that supports what they call communal sharing relationships. To Deonna (2018) I grant that being moved is often evoked by what we might call the “goodness of a core positive value,” but this is because the positivity of this particular category of thick values—according to the extended attachment hypothesis—depends on the same kind of complex disposition that provides the basis for affiliative bonding. This type of bond can also be established with living beings and objects, and hence they can be “good” in this way too and can evoke being moved without exemplifying a core value.

In other words, we are moved by whatever we love in the same way we love a child, parent, sibling, or friend. I believe that Tan (2009, p. 74) best characterized what evokes being moved in the laconic formulation: “Something very dear to you makes its appearance.”

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