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Epistemic emotions and self-trust

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Abstract
Epistemic emotions – namely affective phenomena like curiosity, certainty, and doubt – have been claimed to play a key role in epistemic evaluation and motivation, and, relatedly, to be an integral aspect of the epistemic virtues. In this paper I argue that the experience of epistemic emotions is extensively shaped by self-trust. More specifically, I claim that the set of epistemic emotions that we can undergo, and how these unfold over time, is modulated by the level of trust in one's abilities as a knower. I do so by drawing on research on epistemic injustice, as well as through the exploration of some features of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression. I then argue that the connection between epistemic emotions and self-trust can be best accounted for by conceiving of self-trust, through the framework of philosophical phenomenology, as an affective background orientation which has a structuring role in our cognitive and affective experience.

Keywords Epistemic emotions · Epistemic feelings · Self-trust · Affective background orientations

1 Introduction

In the philosophical literature on affectivity, attention has often been drawn to the fact that emotions appear to play a central role in numerous domains of our life. For example, it has been argued that emotions are involved in moral, aesthetic, religious, and political experience (cf. Goldie, 2010). In addition, some scholars have claimed

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that certain affective phenomena[1] – often referred to as "epistemic emotions" or "epistemic feelings"[2] – are fundamental to the dynamics through which we develop and acquire knowledge (de Sousa, 2008; Morton, 2010).[3] Feelings of wonder, curiosity, certainty, uncertainty, awe, and doubt are some of the experiences which are included in this category. It is recognised that also other emotions can have a role in epistemic activity – for example fear or greed (de Sousa, 2008, p. 185) – but it is claimed that some feelings have a more direct connection with how we achieve, negotiate, and retain knowledge. In particular, attention has been drawn to two main roles played by epistemic emotions in intellectual inquiry. On the one hand, the suggestion has been made that these affective states are integral to epistemic *evaluation*. On the other, it has been claimed that they *motivate* us to act in ways that are epistemically fruitful.

Due to the contributions they make to the pursuit of knowledge, epistemic emotions have also been associated with the epistemic virtues (Candiotto, 2017; Hookway, 2003; Morton, 2010). According to this perspective, in order to be a virtuous epistemic enquirer, one needs not only to entertain certain cognitive states and perform certain actions, but also to experience particular feelings, thus making it the case that normative considerations too apply to the analysis of epistemic emotions.

In this paper I argue that to best understand the way in which these emotions are involved in epistemic activity, we need to broaden the scope of existing accounts, investigating the connection between epistemic emotions and other forms of affective experience. More specifically, I suggest that experiences of self-trust modulate epistemic emotions, facilitating or hindering the experience of patterns of affective responses that are integral to the epistemic virtues.

To do so, I start by providing a reconstruction of some of the key features of epistemic emotions (§ 2). Drawing on research in applied epistemology – and in particular on epistemic injustice – I then move to argue that low self-trust leads to the experience of specific sets of epistemic feelings, and further support this claim through the investigation of the experience of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression (§ 3).

I then proceed to maintain that these dynamics can be best accounted for through an expanded account of self-trust as an affective phenomenon (§ 4). More precisely, making use of notions put forward in contemporary phenomenology (e.g. Slaby, 2012; Ratcliffe, 2008; Bortolan, 2020), I suggest that self-trust is best understood as an affective background orientation which has a structuring effect on the experience

[1] In this paper the term "affective phenomenon" or "affective state" is used to refer to all forms of experience encompassed by the notion of "affectivity" as understood within a phenomenological framework. This captures mental states that have a felt character (and that indeed are referred to also as "feelings"), and which have an evaluative and motivational role (cf. Fuchs, 2013; Slaby, 2008). Affective phenomena, states, or feelings are then further differentiated on the basis of factors such as their intentional structure.

[2] For a discussion of the similarities and differences between accounts of epistemic emotions and epistemic feelings see Arango-Muñoz and Michaelian (2014). In the rest of this paper, I will be using the notion of "epistemic emotion" and "epistemic feeling" interchangeably, since, according to the framework I draw upon, emotions have an intentional and felt character (and are thus a particular kind of feeling), and I believe that typical examples of epistemic feelings (e.g. the feeling of certainty) also possess intentionality.

[3] A diverse terminology has been used by scholars to refer to similar sets of affective states. For example, Stocker (2010) speaks of "intellectual emotions" and Dokic also (2012) of "noetic feelings".

of self, others, and the world. Self-trust, I maintain, shapes some of the intentional states that we can entertain, modulating the type of epistemic emotions we experience and the frequency with which they can be undergone.

2 The nature and role of epistemic emotions

In this section, I will provide an overview of some of the features attributed to epistemic emotions in the philosophical literature, suggesting that there is an aspect of these phenomena that is under-explored within existing approaches and calls for further investigation.

2.1 Evaluative and motivational character

Emotions are often characterised as intentional, felt, and episodic phenomena (e.g. Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). They are indeed often conceived as being directed at, or being about something (e.g. I am afraid *of the dog*), as having a distinct phenomenology (e.g. fear feels bad in a characteristic way), and as being comparatively short-lived (e.g. fear as an emotion may last for hours but not for months).[4]

Emotions are frequently mentioned in reports of intellectual and scientific endeavours (cf. Thagard, 2002), and various scholars have argued that the experience of certain affective phenomena is central to epistemic performance. In particular, within the literature a key claim is that emotions are central to epistemic evaluation (de Sousa, 2008; Hookway, 2003; Morton, 2010), and this is the case for different reasons.

The success of epistemic activities hinges on the exercise of evaluative capacities. For example, we need to evaluate our own reasoning, by assessing the plausibility of our claims, and the validity of our arguments. Similarly, we need to evaluate particular questions, hypotheses, ideas, and facts as relevant or irrelevant for the purpose of our enquiry.

Christopher Hookway's work highlights how the centrality of epistemic emotions to these dynamics is due to the role they play in "epistemic immediacy" (Hookway, 2003),[5] a notion that has to do with the justification of knowledge (Hookway, 2008). From this perspective, knowledge can be immediate when I am confident in holding the relevant beliefs (and this confidence is appropriate) but I am not able to offer reasons or arguments to support them; in other terms, when I am not conscious of the reasons or arguments in virtue of which the beliefs are justified.

According to Hookway (2003, 2008), inductive reasoning provides examples of this form of epistemic immediacy: for instance, certain inferences may appear to us as "plausible and compelling", but we might not be able to articulate why this is the

[4] The notion of "sentiment" is used by some to refer to affective states that are intentional but longer-lasting than emotions (cf. Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p. 82).

[5] In the works I am considering (2003; 2008), Hookway does not use the term "epistemic emotion" or "epistemic feeling", and rather discusses more generally the role of emotions in epistemic activity. However, the dynamics and examples that he explores (e.g. doubt) corroborate the idea that the range of affective phenomena that are relevant in this context are the ones often grouped under the notion of "epistemic emotion" or "epistemic feeling".

case. The plausibility and compelling nature of these inferences have an *experiential* character: they are felt, but we may not be able to articulate what grounds them.

The notion of epistemic immediacy is relevant also to the characterisation of other aspects of the processes through which we acquire knowledge, for example, the way in which we select what we are to inquire about (cf. Hookway, 2003, p. 86). As Hookway highlights, a successful enquiry is one which is started and sustained by appropriate questions, namely those which are most pertinent to the particular aims, contexts, and topics of investigation. Similarly to what is the case when some inferences or ideas appear to be *immediately* compelling, certain questions may appear to us as immediately worth asking, while others do not: such inferences and questions have (epistemic) *salience* (Hookway, 2003, p. 86 ff.; de Sousa, 2008, pp. 185–186).

As suggested by Hookway (2003; 2008), emotions are central to the dynamics through which epistemic immediacy and salience are produced, and this can be best understood when we consider their evaluative dimension. Various theories of affectivity indeed suggest that emotions should be identified with evaluations of a certain kind (e.g. Solomon, 1973; Slaby, 2008). From this perspective, emotions are forms of appraisal of their objects as possessing certain features (which have also been referred to as "evaluative", "value", or "axiological" properties) (cf. Mulligan, 1998, 2010; Tappolet, 2015). Some of these features are connected to the epistemic domain, and this is why emotions can be central to orientating our epistemic activity.

Particularly relevant here are experiences like the "feeling of certainty or rightness" (de Sousa, 2008, p. 191), as well as feelings of doubt, concern, or worry (de Sousa, 2008; Hookway, 2008; Morton, 2010), as these are affective experiences through which we appraise beliefs, ideas, or hypotheses as convincing or unconvincing to different degrees.[6] In addition, the "feeling of knowing" is central to our capacity to recognise that there is something that we know in the first place, even "before we are able to retrieve what we know" (de Sousa, 2008, p. 192). Other affective phenomena that are often referred to in this context are experiences like "curiosity" or "wonder" (de Sousa, 2008; Hookway, 2003; Morton, 2010),[7] through which we can evaluate certain epistemic objects as being promising, interesting, or stimulating, and thus as being worth further consideration or exploration.

In addition to their evaluative role, emotions are cardinal to epistemic activity also in virtue of their motivational significance. We are familiar with the idea that emotions may motivate us to behave in certain ways, and various authors have indeed argued that movements, action tendencies, and/or actions are integral to the structure of emotions (e.g. Scarantino, 2014).

[6] It is worth noting that feelings like certainty and doubt can have different intensities (i.e. we can feel more or less certain or doubtful). When these feelings are not at the extreme of the spectrum, they may give rise to experiences of ambivalence (or indeed, 'mixed feelings') towards the relevant epistemic matters.

[7] One may disagree with the idea that states like curiosity or wonder have an affective character. However, it seems that there is a felt dimension to these experiences. For example, the phenomenology of curiosity appears to be the opposite of that of boredom (which is recognised to be an emotion; see e.g. Elpidorou, 2024). When we are curious about something we feel drawn to and enticed by it, and what we are curious about may 'grab' or 'ignite' our attention, so to speak, thus involving a sensory-like phenomenology.

It has been suggested that emotions are key to motivate us to perform the actions that are conducive to success in epistemic enquiry (Morton, 2010; Hookway, 2003). For example, feelings of interest or curiosity towards a certain view or idea will incline us to further our understanding of that position (de Sousa, 2008, p. 191; Morton, 2010, p. 388 ff.; Thagard, 2002), for instance by reading the work of its main proponents, or by discussing it with experts in the field. Feelings of doubt or uncertainty may also push us to enquire further into a particular issue, but this will be done with the aim of ascertaining how well supported the view or idea under consideration is (Hookway, 2008, p. 64; de Sousa, 2008, p. 191), looking for potential inconsistencies in the argumentation or lack of evidence. Experiences such as the feeling of certainty, on the other hand, may motivate us to temporarily suspend the investigation of a particular topic or problem and to recognise that satisfactory epistemic outcomes have been reached (de Sousa, 2008, p. 191).

More specifically, due to their capacity to confer epistemic salience on certain questions, ideas, and inferences, emotions may motivate us to focus on certain things while ignoring others. They thus contribute to our capacity to select the tasks to which to allocate our cognitive resources, and to shift such resources when needed (Hookway, 2003, p. 84). The acquisition of knowledge requires us to navigate "a maze of possibilities" (Morton, 2010, p. 394), and emotions orientate our attention, enabling us to focus on certain options while discounting or ignoring others.

2.2 The missing ingredient

As illustrated above, in the epistemic domain, as well as in other domains, emotions are recognised to be powerful drivers of behaviour, enabling us to make decisions and execute actions that support epistemic agency and successful epistemic activity. Conversely, it is suggested that the lack of the relevant emotions could have a detrimental effect on our capacity to effectively, or optimally, perform certain epistemic activities. Adam Morton discusses this eventuality by considering the example of a very good scientist who does not care about her subject. As he explains:

> There are emotions she lacks, at any rate with respect to her chosen field. She does not feel wonder at the connections between facts that she can glimpse through the data. She does not feel curiosity about what scientists two hundred years later will have arrived at. Nor does she feel momentary scepticism […] about whether current techniques can unlock the further secrets of the topic. (2010, p. 389)

Morton suggests that the scientist of the example may produce excellent work and succeed in the profession, but it is unlikely that she will radically innovate the discipline, or identify some deep but subtle problems in existing approaches. In his opinion, the lack of certain emotions would make it difficult for the scientist to be motivated in ways that lead to certain forms of intellectual and scientific achievement.

These ideas support the claim that the capacity to experience epistemic emotions is an important or integral aspect of epistemic or intellectual virtues (Candiotto, 2017; Hookway, 2003; Morton, 2010), namely "cognitive excellences" (Battaly,

2008, p. 644) the exercise of which is conducive to epistemic success and intellectual flourishing.

These considerations are imbued with normative claims, in so far as it is suggested that one ought to experience appropriate epistemic emotions in order to be effective in the performance of certain epistemic activities (Goldie, 2012, p. 123; Hookway, 2003, p. 92). Furthermore, the suggestion is also made that the ability to meet the moral obligations we have as epistemic enquirers hinges on the presence of these emotions too (Candiotto, 2017; Morton, 2010).

If this is the case, however, it is imperative to understand what are the reasons that may prevent someone from undergoing these affective experiences. What are the reasons why the scientist in Morton's example, for instance, may fail to feel wonder, curiosity, or scepticism towards her subject?

To answer this question, we might conjecture that working in what has been typically a male-dominated environment may have exposed the scientist to the effects of prejudices, stereotyping and implicit biases about gender and scientific work (cf. e.g. Friedmann & Efrat-Treister, 2023). This may have created obstacles (e.g. being overlooked for promotion) that have dampened the scientist's affective connection to her job. More broadly, there can be a range of factors that, in virtue of her personal history and social identity have impacted on her affective experience when engaging with epistemic pursuits.

If the factors that impact on the capacity to experience epistemic emotions are not understood, we run the risk of making normative claims that may not be warranted, assuming that all agents are equally well-positioned to experience the emotions that are integral to the epistemic virtues. On the contrary, understanding what are the material and psychological conditions that support or hinder the experience of these emotions would enable us to better comprehend where the responsibility for the development of the relevant virtues lies.

In the rest of this study, I will endeavour to contribute to this enterprise by arguing that one of the conditions of possibility for the experience of appropriate epistemic emotions is a socially shaped form of epistemic self-trust.

3 The impact of self-trust

In this section I will consider the influence that low self-trust can have on epistemic performance, suggesting that the former engenders specific configurations of epistemic emotion.

For this purpose, I will first examine the relationship between self-trust and epistemic emotions in the experience of those who are subject to epistemic injustice. After that, I will look at some features of OCD and depression, arguing that these too exemplify the impact that trust in oneself exercises on the structuring of epistemic feelings.

3.1 Epistemic injustice

The idea that there exists a strong connection between epistemic emotions and self-trust emerges from research in epistemology and feminist philosophy. For example, Alessandra Tanesini claims that a necessary aspect of intellectual self-trust is "a disposition to experience positive epistemic feelings" (2020, p. 219).[8] From this point of view, trusting oneself would require a propension to have feelings of certainty in some circumstances, while the inability to shake feelings of doubt when one has reasons to do so would be a sign of "mis-trust" in oneself.[9]

Other accounts of self-trust also contribute to highlight its connection with epistemic emotions, and how these dimensions can be affected by social dynamics. An example of this is provided by Karen Jones' work on "[t]he politics of intellectual self-trust" (2012).

According to Jones (2012), intellectual self-trust is a "stance" or "attitude" taken by the agent towards her own cognitive abilities and processes which involves a series of affective (and cognitive) dispositions. For example, Jones observes that the person who has intellectual self-trust is disposed to feel confident about her capacities in certain domains, as well as to rely on the results of her cognitive processes, to assert them, and to assess her epistemic performance (2012, pp. 243–245).

Jones does not explicitly discuss the role of emotions in the dispositions that she describes, but it is evident that some of these are to be understood as dispositions to experience specific epistemic emotions. Let's consider for instance the inclination to rely on the outcomes of one's cognitive processes. To do so, these outcomes should appear to us as plausible or compelling, and the accounts of epistemic emotions previously discussed have shown that affective states such as the *feeling of certainty* or *rightness* are central to our capacity to make these evaluations. Similarly, the disposition to assess one's cognitive performance depends on the ability to question the quality of that performance, and thus on the experience of feelings such as the *feeling of doubt*.

Jones argues that, in cases of identity-based oppression, individuals may suffer different forms of epistemic injustice, which may weaken intellectual self-trust and negatively impact upon the relevant dispositions (2012, pp. 245–247). Drawing on Miranda Fricker's work (2007), she draws attention to both "testimonial" and "hermeneutical" injustice, and argues that both can have negative effects on self-trust.

For Fricker, testimonial injustice occurs when someone suffers a "credibility deficit", that is when someone is given less credibility than they deserve, due to a prejudice concerning features of the person's social identity (e.g. gender, race, or

[8] For Tanesini, self-trust also requires "a propensity to rely on one's epistemic faculties and abilities", and "a tendency to be confident in one's will power" (2020, p. 219).

[9] The claims I make in this and the following sections of this study support Tanesini's view, in so far as we both establish a connection between self-trust and epistemic emotions. However, the account of epistemic self-trust I provide is different from Tanesini's for two reasons. On the one hand, I understand self-trust not as a dispositional, but rather as an occurrent mental phenomenon, which I suggest to characterise through the phenomenological notions of sense of ability and existential feeling (see Sect. 4.1 and 4.2). Secondly, while Tanesini links feelings of certainty and doubt to the experience of self-trust (or lack of), I also think that other epistemic emotions – for example, curiosity – are modulated by self-trust.

disability) (Fricker, 2007, Ch. 1; McKinnon, 2016, p. 438). This form of epistemic injustice, for example, can be suffered by women when their testimonies are not given adequate consideration due to the stereotype that women are emotional (and that emotions make them unreliable) (Fricker, 2007, p. 9 ff.; McKinnon, 2016, p. 440), or a prejudice regarding their level of competence in domains that have traditionally been male-dominated.

On the other hand, according to Fricker, hermeneutical injustice occurs when oppression results in a lack of conceptual frameworks through which to understand the experience of those who are part of an oppressed group. Those who suffer this form of injustice cannot draw on the concepts which are needed in order to adequately comprehend their own experiences, and this is due to having been marginalised as the effect of structural identity prejudices (cf. Fricker, 2007, Ch. 7; McKinnon, 2016). This is the case, for example, of women who, due to the presence of unequal power relations, were previously deprived of the possibility to conceptualise some of their experiences as instances of "sexual harassment", thus making it difficult for them to trust their own perceptions and to respond accordingly when subject to unwanted sexual attention and behaviours (Fricker, 2007, pp. 149 ff.).

As mentioned above, Jones maintains that self-trust can be negatively affected by epistemic injustice. If the capacity to experience certain patterns of epistemic emotions is integral to the dispositions that constitute self-trust, then it is to be expected that also those patterns will be affected by the weakening or loss of self-trust. To support this point, it is helpful to consider Fricker's own account of the harms that are caused by testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

Fricker (2007) claims that while the primary harm of testimonial injustice consists in being wronged in one's "capacity as a giver of knowledge" (p. 44), one of the secondary harms that can be caused by this form of injustice concerns specifically the epistemic confidence of the person who suffers the injustice. More precisely, Fricker explains how, when testimonial injustice is experienced as a "one-off" occurrence, the victim "may lose confidence in his belief, or in his justification for it, so that he ceases to satisfy the conditions for knowledge" (2007, p. 47). She also observes, however, that when testimonial injustice is experienced more persistently, the person's confidence can be affected more profoundly, so that there is an impact on various dimensions of their intellectual life (2007, pp. 47–48). According to Fricker, one reason why this may be the case is that a loss of epistemic confidence[10] may prevent the subject "from developing certain intellectual virtues" (2007, p. 49), for example "intellectual courage". In her words:

> The under-confident subject will tend to back down in the face of challenge, or even at the very prospect of it, and this tendency may well deprive him of knowledge he would otherwise have gained. In such a case there will be a series of specific deprivations of knowledge—beliefs or hypotheses that are given up too quickly—where some of the epistemic deprivations may constitute significant losses. More generally, and quite apart from the obvious fact that feelings

[10] Drawing also on Keith Lehrer's account (1997), Fricker's characterisation of "epistemic confidence" suggests that this (or its loss) is to be identified with self-trust (or its loss) (2007, p. 49).

> of under-confidence are generally unpleasant in themselves, there is also an epistemic loss to the subject in terms of his intellectual character. (2007, p. 50)[11]

The loss of knowledge that Fricker associates with lack of epistemic confidence is likely to be facilitated, or even brought about, by the experience of certain epistemic emotions. For instance, the easiness with which the under-confident subject in the example would give up his beliefs or hypotheses could be, at least to an extent, the product of intense or extensive *feelings or doubt*, which obliterate or replace the feelings of certainty that are necessary to sustain our epistemic stances. In addition, the person who lacks epistemic confidence may also lose knowledge due to not being inclined to pursue certain questions or ideas, and arguably, *feelings of uncertainty* about how significant or promising such questions or ideas are, or lack of *curiosity or wonder*, may play a key role in this dynamic too.

Fricker further illustrates the points outlined above by discussing an episode recounted by Simone de Beauvoir in her *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Here de Beauvoir explains how, following a discussion with Sartre in which her ideas had been radically challenged (through a process that Fricker reads as exemplifying testimonial injustice), she became unsure not only of what she was thinking, but also that she was thinking in the first place (de Beauvoir, 2001, pp. 343–344; Fricker, 2007, p. 51), thus displaying a significant loss of epistemic confidence.

This highlights how far-reaching the effects of low self-trust can be. As pointed out by Michelle Ciurria (2016, para. 18) in a discussion of this example and "epistemic insecurity", the latter "doesn't just undermine your *performance*, leaving your competency intact […]; it undermines your *capacity to know* certain things, and in extreme cases, to know anything at all". When we don't trust ourselves, not only we may not be able to assert or objectively assess our beliefs, but we may come to downplay or ignore the beliefs we have. This effectively amounts to profoundly discounting our capacities as epistemic agents, since believing something seems to be a necessary condition for having knowledge.

It seems that particular configurations of epistemic emotions may be involved in this predicament too, as having certain beliefs (and the awareness of having them) goes hand in hand with the *feeling of knowing* something, and with at least a moderate *feeling of certainty* about what it is that one knows. In the absence of these experiences, one would feel as if there was no stance to which they can hold firm, and all convictions would appear as merely possible rather than actual beliefs. As observed by Ciurria (2016, para. 19), epistemic insecurity can thus also have a negative impact on decision-making (2016, para. 19), as it "can prevent you from favouring any reasons at all".

While in this paper I am concerned with the effects that low self-trust can have on epistemic processes, it is worth noting at this point that the views that I draw upon here support the idea that also self-trust that is excessively high could have detrimental epistemic effects. The literature on epistemic injustice, for example, highlights that while some people experience credibility deficits, others benefit from a "cred-

[11] Even if more briefly, similar points are made by Fricker also with regard to the consequences of hermeneutical injustice (2007, p. 163).

ibility excess" (Fricker, 2007), and this can contribute to an inflated sense of self-trust (Jones, 2012, p. 246) – and its emotional consequences – in the beneficiaries.[12]

At this extreme of the spectrum, self-trust would entail a sense of oneself as unfailingly able to deal with the epistemic demands of one's situation; essentially, a sense of oneself as unable to be wrong. As suggested by Tanesini (2020), this form of self-trust would incline the experiencer towards behaviours that are epistemically damaging, and would have a "vicious" rather than "virtuous" character. This would likely facilitate the experience of certain emotions (e.g. feelings of certainty), while diminishing or precluding others (e.g. the feeling of doubt or curiosity for other people's views) (cf. Tanesini, 2020, p. 225).

3.2 Obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression

The idea that epistemic emotions are modulated by self-trust can be further supported by considering the experiences that are associated with certain diagnoses of mental illness. In particular, in this section I will look at the experience of obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression, suggesting that these can involve feelings of low self-trust that give rise to specific configurations of epistemic emotions.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a condition characterised by the presence of obsessions, compulsions or both (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Rachman & de Silva, 2009). Obsessions are conceived as "recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced as intrusive and unwanted", while compulsions are defined as "repetitive behaviors or mental acts that an individual feels driven to perform in response to an obsession or according to rules that must be applied rigidly" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 263).

A common type of compulsion consists in the urge to repeatedly clean because of "fear of contamination" (Rachman and de Silva, 2009, p. 9). Contamination can be either physical – for example, direct contact with dirty or polluted objects – or mental – for instance, direct or indirect association with people who are thought to be harmful or morally reprehensible (ibid.; Rachman, 2004).

Another form of compulsion consists in feeling the need to check certain things, such as that doors and windows are closed before leaving the house, or that all electrical appliances are switched off, or that water taps are closed, in order to prevent either oneself or others from being harmed (Rachman and de Silva, 2009, p. 10).

As hinted at above, when both obsessions and compulsions are present it seems that a specific relation between them can exist. Stanley Rachman and Padmal de Silva (2009, pp. 17–18) highlight that obsessions appear to sometimes be *at the origin* of the compulsive behaviours: often, it is in the attempt to mitigate the unpleasant thoughts or images they experience, that people affected by OCD engage in the repetitive sequences of acts and behaviours described previously.

[12] I previously made similar suggestions on phenomenological grounds with regard to experiences similar to self-trust (Bortolan, 2023). More precisely, I suggested that self-esteem that is too high can hinder one's ability to gain knowledge about oneself. This is the case because such level of self-esteem would make it difficult for the individual to recognise false beliefs they may hold about themselves and to revise them accordingly.

As far as accounts of OCD are concerned, cognitive models have been influential. Within this framework, emphasis has been posed on the particular cognitive processes that are considered to play a causal role in the development of the disturbance. Here, attention has been drawn, for instance, to the incorrect evaluations of risk, danger, and personal responsibility (cf. Sookman & Pinard, 2002; Rachman and de Silva, 2009, p. 79), and cognitive "illusions" and biases (Dèttore, & O'Connor, 2013) that are associated with OCD.

However, some scholars have emphasised the role played in the disorder by affective states, including epistemic feelings. Ronald de Sousa (2008), for example, suggests that epistemic processes are affected by specific feelings, and argues that OCD is dependent on the disruption of some of these affective phenomena. More specifically, he claims that those who suffer from OCD experience alterations of the *feelings of certainty or rightness* that usually accompanies the memory of having performed a certain action (2008, pp. 197–198). Drawing also on this, it can be argued that OCD sufferers may be compelled to act in particular ways not primarily because they have incorrect beliefs about the likelihood of a negative event taking place, or their own responsibility for such an event, but rather because they do not experience certain epistemic feelings when they act or think about their actions. For example, while typically we feel certain about having performed a certain act immediately after performing it, this particular feeling would be disrupted in OCD (de Sousa, 2008, pp. 197–198), thus leading sufferers to repeatedly check that they have performed the action, or to perform it again.

This idea seems to be corroborated by research that examines the phenomenology of compulsive behaviours. It has been shown that the actions performed by OCD patients are often accompanied by "feelings of incompleteness", or lack of "closure" regarding the outcome of one' s action (Ecker & Gönner, 2008) – namely the sense that something is missing and that the action cannot be considered to be successfully concluded. As illustrated by Gentsch and colleagues (2012) for instance, people affected by OCD may report that, when performing a particular action such as closing a door, they have the feeling that it may not be properly executed even if they are cognitively aware that it is, and this is linked to the urge to double-check the outcome (p. 652). Arguably, these experiences – also referred to as "Not Just Right Experiences" (NJRE)s (Coles et al., 2003) – are connected to a lack or weakening of the *feelings of certainty* or *rightness* that generally 'tag' our beliefs concerning what we have done, thus putting alterations of epistemic emotions at the core of the experience of compulsions.

Importantly, and in line with the main idea advanced in this study, it has been argued that persons with OCD also undergo disturbances of aspects of experience that are closely related to self-trust. A study carried out by Sanneke de Haan and colleagues (2015), for example, investigated the experiential changes reported by OCD patients following Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) treatment, and identified increases in self-confidence as one of the beneficial transformations experienced by the patients.

Although the study in question uses the term "self-confidence" and not the term "self-trust", it seems that what it captures are fluctuations of the degree to which the participants trust themselves before and after DBS. De Haan and colleagues indeed

report that, after treatment, participants "trust themselves more: they rely more on their own senses, judgments, and capacities. That is, they trust in what they see, and in their own actions" (2015, p. 8).

Low self-trust thus appears to be a central aspect of the experience of persons with a diagnosis of OCD. At the core of the improvements generated by the treatment, is indeed the enhancement of the subjects' reliance on their own perceptions, beliefs, and abilities, fostering an attitude that is more similar to what often displayed by those who do not suffer from OCD.[13]

More specifically, de Haan and colleagues suggest that transformations of self-confidence have an impact on various dimensions of the person's relationship to themselves, others and the world. As they illustrate:

> This increased trust and reliance are manifested by an increased outward-directedness and openness to the world, and increased spontaneity in the way of acting and reacting. Instead of doubting, worrying about all things that might go wrong, and meticulously controlling every detail, participants start relying on their abilities, assuming that things will work out, being more direct and careless. (2015, p. 17)

The increase in self-trust is consequential to transformations of aspects of experience that are intertwined with epistemic emotions, thus further supporting the idea that these dimensions are closely connected.[14] For example, the fact that patients report to be able to act more unreflectively and spontaneously, as well as being more assertive (de Haan et al., 2015) suggests that feelings of certainty or rightness concerning one's beliefs and stances may be experienced more frequently, while feelings of doubt may be less common.

Further evidence in support of the idea that self-trust modulates the experience of epistemic emotions is provided by the examination of other forms of mental ill-health, and, in particular, the experience of depression.

Feelings of low self-trust (cf. Slaby, 2012) are frequently central in the self-narratives of those who suffer from severe depression, and these self-narratives also offer reports of increased or intense epistemic doubt or uncertainty.

For example, in her depression memoir, Tracy Thompson describes how, in the context of a difficult relationship, she experienced a lack of trust in herself that seems to be intertwined with particular affective changes. As she explains:

[13] Empirical research on self-concept and self-worth in the experience of OCD supports this idea. For example, a study by Doron and colleagues (2007) showed that feelings of incompetence in domains that are important to the self are associated with a higher susceptibility to OCD symptoms.

[14] When arguing that the presence of certain epistemic feelings is necessary to intellectual self-trust, Tanesini (2020, p. 221 ff.) considers the case of a woman who feels the urge to repeatedly check that she has her passport on the way to the airport. Tanesini does not mention OCD, but refers to de Sousa's research on the topic and uses the term "compulsions" to refer to the relevant cases. According to her, the woman in the example lacks epistemic feelings that should be experienced in these circumstances, and as such she displays "mis-trust" towards herself. What I discuss in this section further supports this reading of the example.

> I steeled myself to accept some things with blind belief. If my perception of something clashed with Thomas's, mine had to be wrong. Every reaction, every innocuous encounter with another person, was now suspect. How would I know when a man was flirting with me? […] How would I know when I should fight for my point of view in a disagreement with my boss? […] How would I know if my old friends were bad for me? (Thompson, 1996, pp. 125–126)

Thompson's account illustrates how deeply intellectual self-trust can be disrupted when depressive episodes are undergone: the author indeed experiences a profound loss of confidence in her own views, which is accompanied by the difficulty to challenge the convictions and sometimes controlling behaviours of her partner, and leads to a weakening of her own epistemic perspective on the world.

Thompson's report also hints at the presence of what appears as a proliferation of feelings of doubt directed at her own impressions and beliefs, an experience of painful uncertainty that extends to various domains of her life. For those who are severely depressed, a diminished trust in oneself is accompanied by a transformation of one's emotional repertoire, and epistemic emotions are central in this context. For example, Peter Goldie (2012), in his analysis of affective changes and intellectual activity in depression and other experiences, observes the following:

> [...] we have no *curiosity*, no *wonder* at what we read, no feeling of *hope* that we will find some answers, and no *courage* to keep on reading, to keep on asking questions. We no longer feel the keenness to write new material, to face up to challenges to our views, merely going through the motions, driven by mere habit or by the requirements of one's job, churning out more and more variations on the same old stuff. *Our intellectual life has gone cold on us*. (Goldie, 2012, p. 124; my emphasis)

In this passage, the extent to which different intellectual emotions can be affected by depression or similar experiences is outlined. Curiosity and wonder, for example, can be weakened or absent, which has significant implications, both in evaluative terms (e.g. the difficulty to question or change certain views), and in motivational ones (e.g. the lack of desire to write new material).

From a phenomenological point of view, it seems very plausible to link these transformations to the lowering of self-trust previously pointed to. Indeed, a lack of trust in ourselves would amount to a lack of trust in certain things being achievable for us (e.g. producing valuable insights or solving a difficult problem). As such, these possibilities would no longer be felt as 'live options', so to speak, dampening or hindering the relevant epistemic emotions, a dynamic that can be best understood by looking at the affective structure of self-trust itself.

4 What kind of self-trust?

So far, I have argued that there is a fundamental connection between the experience of epistemic emotions and self-trust. More specifically, I have suggested that some of the literature on epistemic injustice indirectly highlights this connection by drawing attention to the influence that self-trust may have on epistemic performance, and I have discussed the relationship between epistemic emotions and self-trust in OCD and depression. However, it is now important to clarify what are the dynamics that ground this relationship. In other terms, why are feelings like certainty, doubt, or curiosity impacted upon by self-trust? And what kind of self-trust is here at issue?

Before we proceed, it is helpful to stress that the notion of self-trust employed within the accounts that I draw upon in this study captures a particular form of this phenomenon, namely "epistemic" or "intellectual" self-trust (cf. Jones, 2012; Tanesini, 2020). This is to be seen specifically as trust in one's capacities as a knower, but it does not entail that the knowledge here at issue is of a particular kind (e.g. mathematical or philosophical). Having epistemic self-trust in this sense means having overall confidence in our capacity to understand the world around us, and in the processes through which such understanding can be achieved (e.g. through the use of faculties such as perception and judgement). These abilities can of course be applied to the acquisition of specific types of knowledge, and one's level of epistemic self-trust may vary depending on the domain (e.g. I may trust myself as a knower when it comes to philosophy but not with regard to mathematics). However, there seems to be also a broad, over-arching sense of our epistemic competence that grounds our everyday dealings with the world, and this is what is at stake in some of the examples of both epistemic injustice and OCD and depression previously discussed. The self-doubt and uncertainty felt by some persons who experience these conditions indeed appear to concern to a significant extent the individual's ability and preparedness to deal with the processes through which we acquire or negotiate knowledge broadly conceived.

However, it is also plausible that other forms of self-trust are eroded in these cases. For example, depression can involve various disruptions of interpersonal experience, and this may go hand in hand with a weakening of confidence in one's ability to effectively interact and connect with others (cf. Ratcliffe, 2015, Ch. 8). Furthermore, it is arguable that the experience of epistemic injustice itself can lead to a loss of confidence that exceeds one's capacity as a knower.

Nevertheless, in this study, my focus remains on epistemic or intellectual self-trust as my interest lies specifically with how our capacities as knowers are modulated. In this regard, I will next look at how our understanding of this form of self-trust could be enhanced by better characterising its affective dimension and, in particular, through the use of ideas coming from the phenomenological tradition.

4.1 Self-trust as an affective phenomenon

How we characterise the relationship between self-trust and epistemic emotions depends, at least in part, on the account of self-trust that we embrace.

A prominent view in philosophy is that self-trust should be conceived as a form of reliance on one's capacities or on oneself (cf. Dormandy, 2024). Within this framework, self-trust is understood as consisting in a specific set of attitudes or dispositions, and the cognitive and volitional dimension of these phenomena often comes to the fore. For example, Trudy Govier (1998, p. 91) explains that, when we have self-trust

> we have positive beliefs about our own motivations and competence. We see ourselves as persons of integrity. We are willing to rely or depend on ourselves, accepting risks attendant on our own decisions and our vulnerability to their consequences. And we have a general disposition to understand ourselves in a positive light, an implicit sense of our own basic worth and integrity.

However, some authors have drawn attention to the role played specifically by affectivity in the experience of self-trust. Jones, for instance, claims that affective dispositions are at the core of intellectual self-trust, characterised as "a stance that an agent takes towards her own cognitive methods and mechanisms" (2012, p. 238), an "attitude of optimism" that has as its object the agent's cognitive competence (pp. 243–244).

Such an account makes it possible to do justice to situations in which someone holds positive beliefs about her capacities, but this conflicts with her lived experience (cf. Jones, 2012, p. 240 ff.). These are cases in which the person's beliefs and affective dispositions may be described as being at odds with each other: while she believes to have certain abilities, her feelings and the actions towards which she is motivated are in conflict with this. For example, this person may acknowledge that she is a good public speaker, but still feel very insecure about her ability to enthuse an audience or to clearly convey ideas, and as a result may be inclined to avoid this type of situation. We have a strong intuition that, in these circumstances, claiming that the person has a high level of self-trust would be incorrect.[15] Rather, it is only by factoring in its affective profile that we can give an accurate account of what self-trust is, and to what extent it is present.[16]

However, the affective dimension of self-trust is not merely dispositional. On the contrary, self-trust is best conceived as an occurrent mental state, an actual feeling or set of feelings with a particular structure, which disposes us to think, feel, and act in certain ways, but which also possesses a distinct phenomenology. In other terms, having trust in oneself 'feels like something' in its own right, and is not a mere collection of emotions and beliefs that we are disposed to entertain. To best illustrate this feature and to account for the role of self-trust in shaping epistemic emotions, I now

[15] This could be supported by claiming that beliefs that are to a large extent inconsistent with one's phenomenological and motivational states are not beliefs we really hold. I also suspect that people who *believe* that they can rely on their capacities but do not feel that this is the case would not be inclined to say that they trust themselves.

[16] I think that it is possible to gauge how much self-trust one has from both a first- and second-person point of view. However, as with any other lived experience, the accuracy with which we identify and report feelings of self-trust may vary depending on various factors (e.g. practice).

turn to some concepts and insights put forward within the philosophical tradition of phenomenology.

4.2 A phenomenological framework

Within the phenomenological literature, various forms of experience which appear to be closely related to, or identifiable with self-trust have been investigated. Of particular relevance in this regard, is Jan Slaby's notion of a "sense of ability" (2012).

According to Slaby, this is a bodily feeling "of one's capacity to act or to come to grips and cope with what affects one", an "embodied sense of capability", that grounds and orientates our interactions with the world (2012, p. 152). The sense of ability thus conceived possesses a felt character and is attributed the power to structure multiple aspects of our experience. In Slaby's words:

> A person's felt relatedness to the world is nothing other than the fundamental sense of ability at the base of his or her perspective on the world—a sense of ability that is at any time bound up with aspects of one's concrete situation. This embodied, modifiable sense of "*I can*" and "*I cannot*" shapes the way the world, others, and oneself are apprehended. (2012, p. 153)

The notion of sense of ability seems to capture what is at the core of the experience of self-trust: a felt appraisal of oneself as having the capacity to respond to and manage one's circumstances in an appropriate way.

Slaby does not distinguish between the different domains of experience and activity which the sense of ability may concern, and it seems plausible that one's experience of self-trust may encompass a range of areas: we do have a general sense of confidence in our abilities that is irrespective of context. However, as the literature previously surveyed suggests, we also experience ourselves as capable to a certain degree with regard specifically to the intellectual or epistemic domain. I think that this too can be captured by the notion of sense of ability, as it is arguable that such feeling can vary depending on the realm of experience that is in question. For example, a low sense of physical ability may coexist with a high sense of cognitive ability.

According to Slaby, the sense of ability can be understood through Matthew Ratcliffe's notion of "existential feelings" (Ratcliffe, 2005, 2008).[17] Existential feelings are a particular kind of affective state, which Ratcliffe differentiates from what has typically been referred to through the concept of "emotion" (2008, pp. 39–40). While emotions are often taken to be intentional affective phenomena, existential feelings typically have a non-intentional structure. Importantly, they are taken to shape the range of intentional states (affective and of other kinds) that we can entertain (Ratcliffe, 2010).

[17] Both the sense of ability and existential feelings more broadly are conceived as bodily or corporeal experiences (Slaby, 2012; Ratcliffe, 2008). While I agree with Slaby and Ratcliffe that these phenomena can sometimes have a bodily phenomenology, I also think that there are feelings that are not bodily feelings, and it is possible that the phenomenology of self-trust does not involve distinct bodily features.

Existential feelings are affective "background orientations" that permeate our experience, "ways of finding oneself in the world" (Ratcliffe, 2005; 2008) which determine the manners in which things can be significant for us, thus exercising a structuring role in our cognitive, affective, and practical life. Because of this, existential feelings are taken to shape our "possibility space" (Ratcliffe, 2008; 2015), modulating our sense of what it is possible for us to experience and achieve.

Existential feelings include affective phenomena that, according to Ratcliffe, have often been overlooked in the literature on affectivity, for example "feelings of familiarity, and unfamiliarity, strangeness, isolation, emptiness, belonging, being at home in the world, being at one with things […]" (2008, p. 68). Ratcliffe's work illustrates how these feelings can shape one's perception of the world, constraining our responses to particular objects, people, events, and states of affairs.

Phenomenological research also suggests that affective phenomena that typically have an intentional character – and can thus be considered to be emotions – can acquire the structure of existential feelings (Ratcliffe, 2010; Bortolan, 2017). Among these, the case of guilt and shame is particularly interesting, because these are affective phenomena that are closely connected to self-evaluation and have been recognised to have epistemic significance.

While both guilt and shame are often directed at particular actions, omissions, traits and features of the self, these affective states can also lack intentional objects: it is possible to feel guilty or ashamed without there being anything in particular that one is guilty or ashamed of (cf. Ratcliffe, 2010; Bortolan, 2017). In some cases, these forms of guilt and shame can be so pervasive and profound that the possibility of not being culpable or defective is no longer experienced as open for one. As originally shown by Ratcliffe with regard to guilt (2010), in these cases the feelings that are experienced have the structure of existential feelings and impact on the range of mental states that the person is able to entertain (cf. also Bortolan, 2017). For example, someone who is feeling existentially guilty may be unable to evaluate their actions as morally praiseworthy, or to feel pride for having displayed integrity on certain occasions. Similarly, someone who experiences existential shame may be less likely to recognise others as accountable for certain wrongdoings and may be inclined to blame themselves when negative events occur.

Existential feelings are experienced by individual subjects and are rooted in one's personal history; however, core dimensions of our social identity can impact on the type of existential feelings we experience. For example, Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) has shown how – due to the oppressive dynamics they are subjected to in patriarchal societies – the experience of a form of shame that shares some of the key features of existential feelings is particularly marked among women. As Bartky outlines (1990, p. 85):

> I shall maintain that women typically are more shame-prone than men, that shame is not so much a particular feeling or emotion (though it involves specific feelings and emotions) as a pervasive affective attunement to the social environment, that women's shame is more than merely an effect of subordination but, within the larger universe of patriarchal social relations, a profound mode of disclosure both of self and situation.

These dynamics can be further illuminated by considering how existential feelings arise and can be shaped by affective and non-affective processes. It is recognised that, while affective background orientations constrain the range of intentional states that we can entertain, such intentional states can also feed back into and modify the orientations themselves (e.g. Ratcliffe, 2015, p. 151). In addition, I have argued that the narratives we engage with can exert a significant influence on our existential feelings (Bortolan, 2021), and arguably this is the case not only for the stories we tell about ourselves, but also for the ones that are upheld socially. From this perspective, and as exemplified by Bartky's work of shame, we can expect that the assumptions and expectations that are perpetuated with regard to certain social identities could impact on the affective orientations of the relevant subjects, shaping their sense of possibility. [18]

So, not only existential feelings mould cognitive and practical experience in ways that have epistemic relevance, but they are also influenced by one's positioning within certain socio-cultural environments. Importantly, these features are exhibited by the sense of ability and epistemic self-trust too.[19]

The feeling of oneself as more or less capable to deal with the demands of life – or of particular kinds of situations – impacts on the range of intentional, and emotional, relations we can entertain with the world. A low sense of confidence in one's ability to deal with the demands of one's physical environment, for example, will shape one's perception of, and attempts to act within that environment. This is highlighted, for example, by Havi Carel's work on the loss of "bodily certainty" that may occur in the context of physical illness, when a loss of faith in one's body results in a different felt appraisal of one's surroundings and in one's behaviour becoming less spontaneous and more planned and controlled (2013).

Similar dynamics seem to be in play with regard specifically to one's sense of epistemic ability. The lack or erosion of confidence in one's epistemic capacities can lead to a loss of motivation to engage in activities that are important or consequential to the acquisition of knowledge. Examples of this are provided by the experience of some women whose sense of competence as knowers is challenged or undermined by dynamics associated with epistemic injustice. For instance, it has been suggested that female students and academics – especially in areas that have been traditionally male-dominated – tend to act in particular ways. For example, women tend to ask fewer questions than men in the classroom (Carter et al., 2018), and they are less likely to submit papers to top scientific journals (Basson et al., 2023; Nature, 2024). In addition, women often exhibit behaviours that display different self-evaluative

[18] Another example of how a social narrative about certain subjects can impact on the affective experience of those subjects is provided by Iris Marion Young's account of cultural expectations concerning feminine bodily comportment (2005). Young is not explicitly concerned with affective background orientations, but draws attention to how women's felt sense of physical possibilities is shaped by assumptions about their bodily capacities and propensions.

[19] Elsewhere (Bortolan, 2018; 2020) I have argued that self-esteem is to be understood as an existential feeling, and that self-trust is, alongside self-respect, a component of self-esteem. When paired with the claims I advance in the present contribution, this would entail that some existential feelings (e.g. self-trust) can be part of other existential feelings (e.g. self-esteem). Exploring this dynamic exceeds the scope of this paper; however, it is worth noting that the points I make here do not presuppose a specific account of self-esteem.

attitudes from those displayed by men: women caveat or qualify more the questions that they ask (Bartky, 1990, p. 89), and in some contexts have been shown to be prone to attribute the causes of their successes to others or external factors rather than themselves (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Slaby's account of the sense of ability effectively draws attention to the affective and experiential dimension of self-trust, and to the structuring role that it can play with respect to perception and cognition. More precisely, by making it possible to understand different forms of trust in oneself as akin to "existential feelings", Slaby's work points to the fact that self-trust has the power to structure the way in which we relate to ourselves, others, and what we encounter.

As I outlined in previous work (2020, p. 361), this is also supported by Ratcliffe's research on the topic of "interpersonal trust", which is conceived as a form of experience that extensively modulates our perception of the world (Ratcliffe, 2015; Ratcliffe et al., 2014). Ratcliffe and colleagues explored the wide-ranging effects that disruptions of interpersonal trust caused by trauma can have, and linked this also to a loss of self-confidence (Ratcliffe et al., 2014, p. 5). So, while Ratcliffe does not talk of self-trust as an existential feeling, in this work self-trust seems to be closely connected to a form of experience that has the structure of an affective background orientation.[20]

But how does this all relate to the understanding of epistemic emotions and how they are modulated? As mentioned before, intentional mental states are grounded in affective background orientations, and this is the case also for epistemic feelings (Ratcliffe, 2008, p. 258). Otherwise said, the experience of emotional states such as wonder, curiosity, certainty, or doubt also hinges upon the presence of certain existential feelings, and self-trust is one of these existential feelings.

In order for epistemic feelings such as certainty and rightness to be entertained, I need in the first place to find myself in a world in which being a successful epistemic enquirer is a possibility for me. More specifically, I need to experience myself as being in a position in which I can, at least in principle, gain knowledge. If I experience myself as unable to do so, certain kinds of epistemic emotions would be precluded to me, and I would rather be much more likely to experience emotions such as doubt, concern, or worry. Conversely, the experience of the latter type of epistemic emotion hinges upon an experience of my relationship with the world as one in which mistakes of a certain type can occur. In other terms, a form of absolute self-trust in my capacities that would not allow for the possibility of being wrong, would limit my emotional repertoire to the experience of epistemic emotions such as certainty and rightness.

Self-trust is thus a condition of possibility for epistemic emotions, and, consequently, its lack or loss can result in the inability or difficulty to experience emotions that are key to intellectual inquiry.

[20] Ratcliffe talks of the experience of trust and its lack as being "integral to existential feeling" (2015, p. 123), which may suggest that he conceives of it as something that is common to all existential feelings, rather than a single, distinct affective orientation in its own right. I think, however, that, due to its distinct phenomenology and experience-shaping role, it is legitimate to conceive of self-trust or lack thereof as a specific existential feeling.

Understanding this dynamic can help us to shed light on the normative dimension of these phenomena. As outlined earlier, epistemic emotions are indeed considered as an integral part of the epistemic virtues, since a responsible and successful epistemic enquirer is one that reliably experiences these emotions to the right degree in the right circumstances. If epistemic emotions are shaped by self-trust, and this, like other existential feelings is socially shaped, the responsibility for developing the relevant virtues should not be placed solely on the individual, and should rather be seen as something we are collectively accountable for.

5 Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to broaden our understanding of the relationship between affective experience and epistemic activity.

I moved from the acknowledgment that existing accounts of epistemic emotions do not fully unearth the conditions of possibility of these affective states, and drawing on research in applied and feminist epistemology, I suggested that mental states typically associated with the concept of self-trust play a key role in this contest. More precisely, exploring epistemic injustice and aspects of the phenomenology of OCD and depression, I claimed that which epistemic emotions are experienced, and how they are experienced, is profoundly shaped by the level of confidence in one's own epistemic capacities.

I proceeded to argue that the affective and experiential dimension of this phenomenon can be best accounted for within the framework of philosophical phenomenology, suggesting that self-trust can be conceived as an affective background orientation which has a structuring role in our relationship with the world, and epistemic emotions are among the phenomena that it modulates.

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Conflict of interest The author does not have any conflict of interest to report.

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