

# Emotions and their formal objects

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Emotions are said to involve formal objects, in the way fear involves the fearful (Kenny 2003: 134). It is with respect to their formal objects that an emotion’s appropriateness may be assessed (cf. Goldie 2000: 34) and they might perhaps be used for the notoriously tricky definition of perversion (Nagel 1969). While they clearly play an explanatory rôle both in our every-day practice with and our theorising about emotions, the ontology, metaphysics and epistemology of emotions’ formal objects remain largely unexplored. In my talk, I would like to make some progress on this score, focussing on their modal behaviour: in what sense can it be said that the fearful could have failed to make fear appropriate? in what sense can we imagine not fearing the fearful? Taking a lead from Tamar Gendler’s “puzzle of imaginative resistance” (Gendler 2000), I’ll argue that both the fearfulness of the fearful is a consequence of the way emotive states behave under off-line simulation: it is because the relation between make-belief fear and real fear is different from that between pretense and assertion that we cannot imagine not being afraid of the fearful. This does not, however, mean that it is necessary that we fear the fearful.

## References

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