

# Emotion as Meaning: A Teleological Map of Human Feeling

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a unified theory of emotion grounded in meaning, purpose, and value. Drawing on empirical research from the emotional circumplex, evolutionary biology, cognitive appraisal theory, and existential psychology, it argues that emotions are not arbitrary reactions but signals of significance. Positive emotions arise when circumstances align with embedded or conscious purposes, while negative emotions emerge when these purposes are frustrated or threatened. Each primary emotion corresponds to a specific value domain—exploration, vitality, unity, or stability—forming four pairs of opposites: curiosity–fear, joy–sadness, love–hate, and peace–anger. This framework positions emotion as the felt experience of meaning itself, integrating reflexive biological responses with reflective existential ones. Emotions thus function as a diagnostic system, revealing both the valence of experience and the underlying value at stake. The model provides a coherent map of emotional life and a foundation for understanding meaning, purpose, and human flourishing.

## FOREWORD

*“Since emotion is tied to meaning or purpose, it occurs to me that emotion would only exist in a world where meaning and purpose are real.”*

*Craig Paardekooper*

# CONTENTS

## 1. [The Emotional Map](#)

Research shows that human emotions form a circular structure: emotions close together are similar; emotions opposite each other are polar opposites. These cluster into eight primary groups forming four pairs:

- Curiosity – Fear
- Joy – Sadness
- Love – Hate
- Peace – Anger

These pairs reflect opposing responses to the same underlying value.

## 2. [Emotion and Meaning](#)

Emotion is not random arousal. It is the felt significance of events relative to our goals, values, and identity.

- We feel emotion only when something *matters*.
- Meaning gives direction to emotion.
- Emotion signals: “Pay attention — this is significant.”

This applies to art, relationships, danger, achievement, and memory.

## 3. [Meaning and Purpose](#)

Meaning is the broad sense of significance; purpose is one way meaning becomes structured into goals.

- Meaning can exist without a defined purpose (grief, awe, love).
- Purpose without meaning feels hollow (external pressure, empty achievement).
- Values can motivate action as both cause and goal.

## 4. [All Emotion Is Meaning-Driven](#)

Even emotions that seem biological or reflexive are rooted in embedded meaning:

- Reflex fear → meaning = threat to survival
- Hormonal joy → meaning = reward for adaptive behavior
- Conditioned sadness → meaning encoded in memory

Thus, emotion always reflects significance, whether conscious or evolutionary.

## 5. [Positive and Negative Emotion](#)

Valence reflects alignment or misalignment with meaning:

- Positive emotions arise when reality supports our purposes.
- Negative emotions arise when reality frustrates or threatens them.

## 6. [Specific Emotions are Associated with Specific Meanings](#)

Meaning	+ emotion	- emotion
• Exploration	Curiosity	Fear
• Vitality	Joy	Sadness
• Unity	Love	Hate
• Stability	Peace	Anger

Emotions are therefore diagnostic indicators of which value is at stake.

## **7. [Emotion as a Signal System](#)**

Emotions reveal:

1. Valence — alignment vs. misalignment
2. Value — the specific meaning domain involved

This makes emotion a real-time map of meaning in human life.

## **8. [Summary](#)**

## **9. [Postscript](#)**

# MAP OF THE EMOTIONS [\(contents\)](#)

## Angular Placements for a Population of Emotion Terms

<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Angular placement (degrees)</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Angular placement (degrees)</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Angular placement (degrees)</i>
Accepting	0.0	Rejected	136.0	Impatient	230.3
Agreeable	5.0	Bored	136.0	Grouchy	230.0
Serene	12.3	Disappointed	136.7	Defiant	230.7
Cheerful	25.7	Vacillating	137.3	Aggressive	232.0
Receptive	32.3	Discouraged	138.0	Sarcastic	235.3
Calm	37.0	Puzzled	138.3	Rebellious	237.0
Patient	39.7	Uncertain	139.3	Exasperated	239.7
Obliging	43.3	Bewildered	140.3	Disobedient	242.7
Affectionate	52.3	Confused	141.3	Demanding	244.0
Obedient	57.7	Perplexed	142.3	Possessive	247.7
Timid	65.0	Ambivalent	144.7	Greedy	249.0
Scared	66.7	Surprised	146.7	Wondering	249.7
Panicky	67.7	Astonished	148.0	Impulsive	255.0
Afraid	70.3	Amazed	152.0	Anticipatory	257.0
Shy	72.0	Awed	156.7	Boastful	257.3
Submissive	73.0	Envious	160.3	Expectant	257.3
Bashful	74.7	Disgusted	161.3	Daring	260.1
Embarrassed	75.3	Unsympathetic	165.6	Curious	261.0
Terrified	75.7	Unreceptive	170.0	Reckless	261.0
Pensive	76.7	Indignant	175.0	Proud	262.0
Cautious	77.7	Disagreeable	176.4	Inquisitive	267.7
Anxious	78.3	Resentful	176.7	Planful	269.7
Helpless	80.0	Revolted	181.3	Adventurous	270.7
Apprehensive	83.3	Displeased	181.5	Ecstatic	286.0
Self-conscious	83.3	Suspicious	182.7	Sociable	296.7
Ashamed	83.3	Dissatisfied	183.0	Hopeful	298.0
Humiliated	84.0	Contrary	184.3	Gleeful	307.0
Forlorn	85.0	Jealous	184.7	Elated	311.0
Nervous	86.0	Intolerant	185.0	Eager	311.0
Lonely	88.3	Distrustful	185.0	Enthusiastic	313.7
Apathetic	90.0	Vengeful	186.0	Interested	315.7
Meek	91.0	Bitter	186.0	Delighted	318.6
Guilty	102.3	Unfriendly	188.0	Amused	321.0
Sad	108.5	Stubborn	190.4	Attentive	322.4
Sorrowful	112.7	Uncooperative	191.7	Joyful	323.4
Empty	120.3	Contemptuous	192.0	Happy	323.7
Remorseful	123.3	Loathful	193.0	Self-controlled	326.3
Hopeless	124.7	Critical	193.7	Satisfied	326.7
Depressed	125.3	Annoyed	200.6	Pleased	328.0
Worried	126.0	Irritated	202.3	Generous	328.0
Disinterested	127.3	Angry	212.0	Ready	329.3
Grief-stricken	127.3	Antagonistic	220.0	Sympathetic	331.3
Unhappy	129.0	Furious	221.3	Content	338.3
Gloomy	132.7	Hostile	222.0	Cooperative	340.7
Despairing	133.0	Outraged	225.3	Trusting	345.3
Watchful	133.3	Scornful	227.0	Tolerant	350.7
Hesitant	134.0	Unaffectionate	227.3		
Indecisive	134.0	Quarrelsome	229.7		

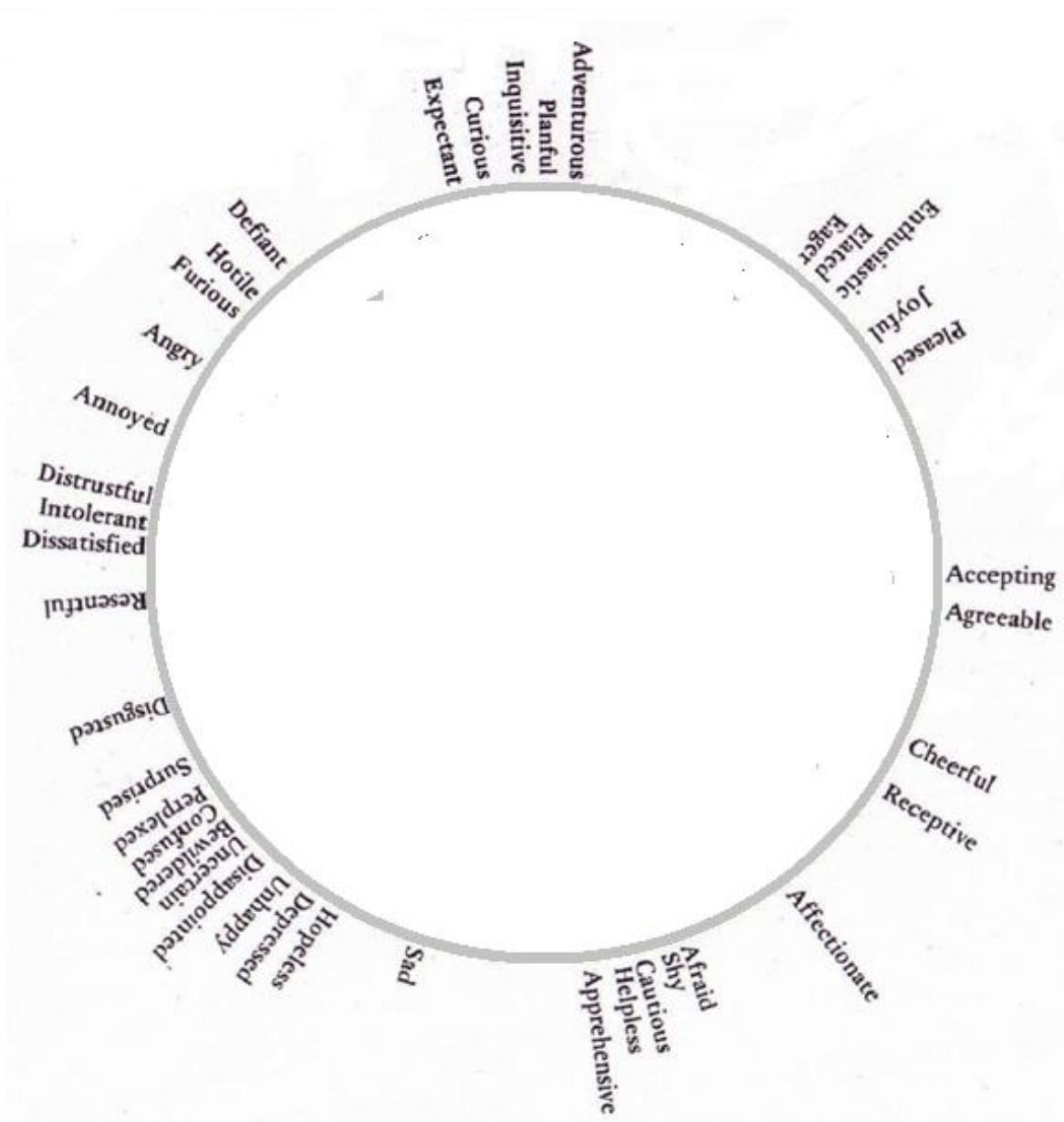
Researchers in the psychology of the emotions set out to make a list of all the emotions. This list is shown above. See bibliography for references.

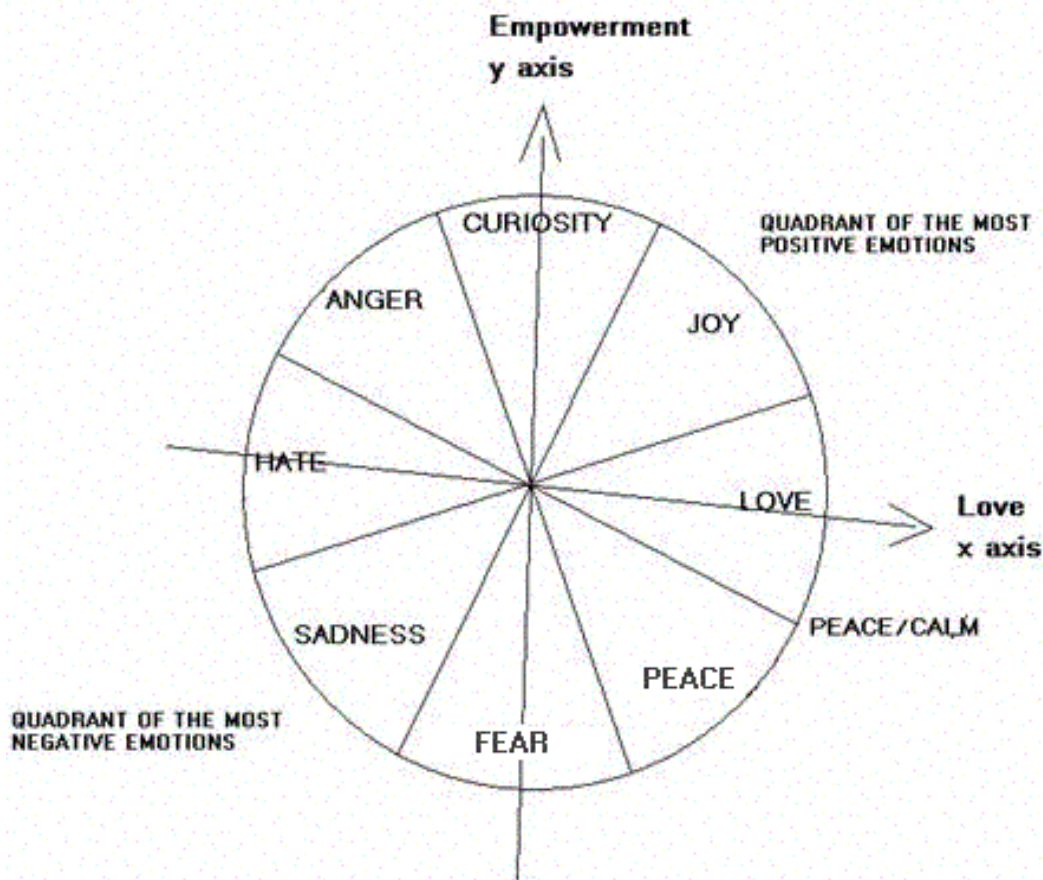
The researchers then asked many thousands of subjects to rate each emotion according to its similarity or dissimilarity to each of the other emotions. When this was completed, analysis of the results revealed an incredible and remarkable pattern. What they uncovered was a map of all the emotions.

The emotions were arranged in a CIRCLE as shown in diagram 1 below.

Note that the nearer an emotion is to another emotion on the circumference of the circle – the more similar it is to that emotion, where-as emotions that are opposite one another on the circle are least similar – in fact they are polar opposites.

It is curious that the human psyche should reveal such a perfect geometry.





Further analysis revealed that the emotions cluster into 8 main groups characterized by the following 8 labels. (Diagram 2)

- Joy
- Love
- Peace
- Fear
- Sadness
- Hate
- Anger
- Curiosity

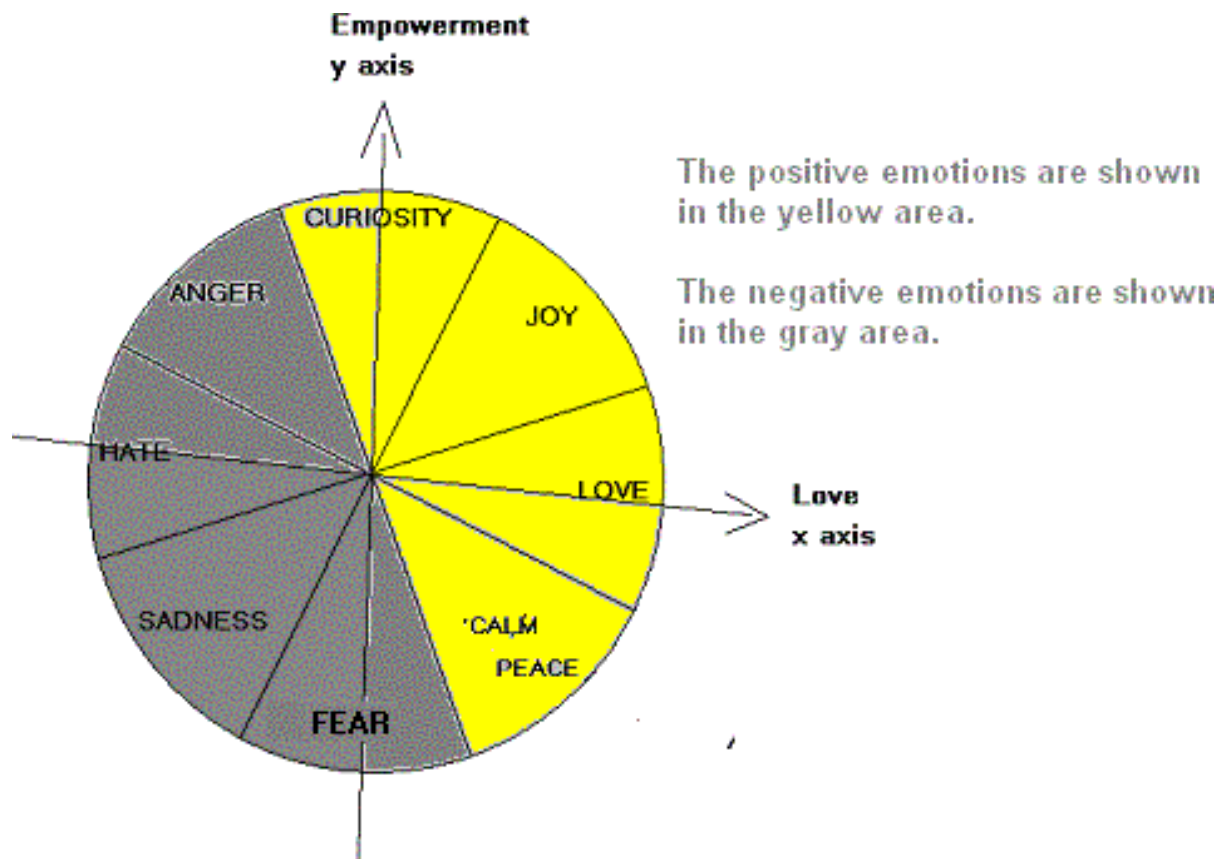
These 8 groups form 4 pairs of opposites.

- Love and Hate
- Joy and Sadness
- Anger and Peace
- Exploration and Fear

There are 2 main axes or dimensions

- X-axis – representing approach-avoidance, inclusion-exclusion, warmth-cold
- Y-axis – representing empowerment-helplessness

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE (contents)



Each of these emotions were also rated in terms of their positive-ness and desirability. The emotion-circle furnishes us with a map as to where the positive emotions lie in relation to the other darker emotions.

If happiness is defined as being in a positive emotional state, then this simple map may serve as a guide to and definition of happiness. Happiness has components of love, peace, joy and exploration.

# EMOTION AND MEANING ([contents](#))

Emotion is tied to meaning. We get emotional when an event is significant because it holds meaning for us.

Emotion and meaning are inseparable. We don't feel strongly about *everything*; we feel when something **matters**. Significance is the bridge:

## Emotion as Meaningful Response

- **Emotion = valuation of meaning.** An event triggers emotion when it is interpreted as significant for our goals, values, or identity.
- **Meaning gives direction.** Without meaning, emotions would be random arousals. Meaning makes them purposeful — joy at success, grief at loss, fear at danger.
- **Emotion as signal.** Emotions are the body's way of saying: *this matters*. They highlight meaning in lived experience.
- **Langer:** Art is the symbolic embodiment of feeling. But feeling is always tied to meaning — art embodies *significant* emotions, not trivial ones.
- **Beardsley:** His dimensions (unity, intensity, complexity) describe the *form* of feeling. But those forms are powerful only when they carry meaning.
- **Plutchik:** His circumplex shows universal emotions. But we only experience them when events are meaningful — anger at injustice, joy at love, fear at threat.

## Example

- **Hamlet's grief** is not just sadness; it's sadness tied to meaning — the death of his father, betrayal, injustice.
- **Beethoven's Ninth** is not just joy; it's joy tied to meaning — the vision of universal brotherhood.
- **A sunset** is not just light; it's beauty tied to meaning — the cycle of time, mortality, renewal.

So, we can say:

- **Emotion is the felt significance of meaning.**
- **Beauty is the symbolic embodiment of meaningful emotion.**

Without meaning, emotions are shallow; without emotion, meaning is abstract. Together, they create the depth of human experience.

Emotion doesn't just "float around" in us—it's bound to meaning, to significance.

## Why Emotion Is Tied to Meaning

- **Selective response:** We don't feel strongly about everything. Emotion arises when something touches our values, goals, or identity.

- **Signal of importance:** Emotions act like a spotlight, telling us “this matters.” Joy signals fulfillment, anger signals violation, fear signals threat.
- **Contextual anchor:** The same event can feel neutral or deeply emotional depending on its meaning to us. Losing a soccer match might be trivial to one person, devastating to another who sees it as tied to self-worth.
- **Memory and learning:** Emotional experiences are more likely to be remembered because they’re meaningful, shaping how we learn and grow.

### **A Deeper Angle**

Some theorists argue that emotion is the *felt sense of meaning itself*. For example:

- Viktor Frankl suggested that meaning is the deepest human drive, and emotions are the way we register alignment or misalignment with it.
- Neuroscience shows that the brain’s limbic system (emotion) and prefrontal cortex (meaning-making) are tightly interconnected.

So, in a way, emotion is the body’s way of saying: “Pay attention—this is significant.”

# MEANING AND PURPOSE ([contents](#))

Viktor Frankl suggested that meaning is the deepest human drive, and emotions are the way we register alignment or misalignment with it.

## Meaning vs. Purpose in Frankl's View

- **Meaning:** For Frankl, meaning is broader than just “purpose.” It’s about the significance we assign to life events, relationships, and experiences. Meaning can be found in love, in suffering, in creativity, or in small everyday acts—it’s not always a grand mission.
- **Purpose:** Purpose is more specific. It’s a direction or goal, like “I want to become a teacher” or “I want to raise a family.” Purpose is one way we *live out* meaning, but meaning itself can exist even without a clearly defined purpose.

## How They Connect

- Purpose is a **subset of meaning**. It’s a structured, goal-oriented way of expressing meaning.
- Meaning is the **felt significance**—the “why” behind our emotions. When something aligns with our sense of meaning, we feel joy, fulfillment, or peace. When it clashes, we feel frustration, emptiness, or despair.
- Frankl emphasized that even in situations where purpose seems impossible (like imprisonment in a concentration camp), people could still find meaning—through dignity, love, or inner freedom.

So, when we say “meaning,” we’re talking about the deep sense of significance that gives life coherence. Purpose is one way to embody that meaning, but meaning itself is more fundamental.

## Examples of Meaning Without Clear Purpose

- **Grief and love:** A person mourning a loved one may not have a defined “purpose” in that moment, but the experience is deeply meaningful because it reflects love and connection.
- **Art appreciation:** Standing before a painting in a museum, someone may feel awe or transcendence. They don’t have a “goal” or “mission” there, but the moment carries meaning.
- **Spiritual experience:** Meditation or prayer can feel profoundly significant even without a concrete purpose attached.

## Examples of Purpose Without Deeper Meaning

- **Career ladder climbing:** Someone might pursue promotions or higher pay because it’s expected, but if they don’t connect it to deeper values, the purpose feels hollow.
- **Routine goals:** Completing tasks like “hit the gym five times a week” can be purposeful, but if it’s only about checking boxes rather than health or joy, it lacks meaning.
- **External pressure:** A student might aim for top grades because of parental expectations. That’s a purpose, but if it doesn’t resonate with their own sense of meaning, it can feel empty.

## How They Interact

- Meaning is the **felt significance**—the “why.”
- Purpose is the **structured direction**—the “what.”
- When they align, life feels rich and coherent. When they diverge, we may feel either aimless (meaning without purpose) or hollow (purpose without meaning).

Meaning is when an activity reflects values. But values need not manifest only as the goal of an activity, they can be the cause of the activity.

## Meaning as Reflection of Values

- Meaning often arises when an activity **embodies or reflects values**—whether those values are love, justice, creativity, growth, or something else.
- For example, volunteering at a shelter reflects compassion; writing music reflects creativity; spending time with family reflects love.

## Values as Cause vs. Goal

- **Values as cause:** Sometimes we act because a value *drives* us, even if we don't have a clear goal. You might comfort a friend simply because kindness motivates you, not because you're aiming at a specific outcome.
- **Values as goal:** Other times, values are the *end state* we aim for. For instance, pursuing a career in medicine because you want to achieve healing and service.

## Why This Matters

- Meaning doesn't require a neatly defined goal. It can emerge from the **motivation itself**—the cause.
- This explains why small, spontaneous acts can feel deeply meaningful: they're pure expressions of values without being tied to a larger purpose.
- Conversely, when values are only treated as distant goals but not lived in the moment, life can feel abstract or disconnected.

So, meaning is when activity reflects values, but values can shape meaning both as the **cause that initiates action** and as the **goal that action aims toward**.

# IS EMOTION TRIGGERED BY OUR DEGREE OF ALIGNMENT WITH MEANING?

[\(contents\)](#)

Some argue that emotion is not *always* triggered by alignment with meaning. While emotional alignment—living in harmony with your values and sense of purpose—can strongly influence emotional states, they argue that emotions can also arise from biological, situational, and unconscious processes that don't directly involve meaning [taperedink.com](#) [emotionalscale.com](#) [neurolaunch.com](#).

## 1. Emotional Alignment and Meaning

- Definition: Emotional alignment occurs when your thoughts, feelings, and actions are in harmony with your core values and authentic self [neurolaunch.com](#).
- Effect: When aligned, emotions tend to feel balanced, positive, and resilient. Misalignment often produces tension, confusion, or dissatisfaction [taperedink.com](#).
- Example: A person working in a career that reflects their values may feel joy and fulfillment, while someone in a misaligned role may feel frustration or emptiness.

## 2. Emotions can be triggered independently of meaning?

- Biological factors: Hormones, neurotransmitters, and brain activity can spark emotions (e.g., fear response to sudden danger).
- Situational stimuli: External events like loud noises, social interactions, or unexpected changes can evoke emotions without deeper meaning.
- Conditioning and memory: Past experiences can trigger emotions automatically, even if they don't align with current values.
- Cultural and social norms: Emotions may arise from expectations or pressures, not necessarily from personal meaning.

However, a closer analysis of emotion shows that emotions are always triggered by meaning.

**Biological factors:** Hormones, neurotransmitters, and brain activity can spark emotions (e.g., fear response to sudden danger). But these only spark emotion because they are part of biological systems that are end directed, and that end requires us to be emotionally aroused for our preservation. So, they are instances of embedded meaning.

**Situational stimuli:** External events like loud noises, social interactions, or unexpected changes can evoke emotions, but these are reflex emotions that are triggered by stimuli representing danger, the danger itself being a significant stimulus. Once again, this is an embedded meaning or purpose related to survival triggering the emotion.

**Conditioning and memory:** Past experiences can trigger emotions automatically, even if they don't align with current values. However, the stimulus that generated or created the initial conditioned response, was meaningful and significant.

So, **all emotions are meaning-driven**, even when they appear reflexive or automatic.

## Biological Factors

- **My view:** Hormones and neurotransmitters don't just "spark" emotions randomly; they are part of systems designed for survival.
- **Interpretation:** Fear, anger, joy, etc., are not arbitrary chemical accidents—they are embedded in evolutionary purpose. The "meaning" here is preservation of life and reproduction.
- **Example:** Adrenaline surges in danger → fear motivates escape → survival is the embedded meaning.

## Situational Stimuli

- **My view:** Loud noises or sudden changes trigger reflex emotions because they *represent danger*.
- **Interpretation:** Even reflexes are not meaningless—they are tied to significance. The meaning is the potential threat to safety.
- **Example:** Startle response to a loud bang → fear → prepares body for fight/flight. Embedded meaning: protection.

## Conditioning and Memory

- **My view:** Conditioned responses are rooted in the original meaningful stimulus.
- **Interpretation:** Even if the present trigger seems arbitrary (e.g., a song causing sadness), the *origin* was significant (loss, trauma, joy). Meaning is embedded in the memory trace.
- **Example:** Dog bite → fear of barking → meaning is danger encoded in memory.

## Core Insight

What I'm articulating is a **teleological view of emotion**: emotions are not random sparks but **purpose-driven signals**. Even when they seem detached from conscious meaning, they are rooted in embedded evolutionary or experiential significance.

This contrasts with a more mechanistic view that treats emotions as "outputs" of stimuli without deeper purpose. I'm saying: *the purpose is always there, even if hidden*.

**Based on this framework, it's coherent to say that all emotion is tied to meaning, whether that meaning is embedded (biological, evolutionary, survival-oriented) or conscious (reflective, value-driven, existential).**

## Why This Holds Together

- Biological/emergent emotions: Even reflexive fear or hormonal surges are not "random." They are embedded in evolutionary purpose — the meaning is survival and adaptation.
- Situational triggers: Sudden noises or social cues carry significance because they represent potential threat, opportunity, or social connection. Meaning is embedded in their relevance to our well-being.
- Conditioned responses: Though automatic, they trace back to an original meaningful event. The emotional residue is a memory of significance.
- Conscious emotions: These are the clearest examples — joy in alignment with values, grief at loss, pride in achievement. Here meaning is explicit and reflective.

## The Unified View

- Embedded meaning: Rooted in biology, evolution, and survival.

- Conscious meaning: Rooted in reflection, values, and chosen purpose.
- Together: They form a continuum. Even when we don't *recognize* meaning, it is still there, embedded in the system that gave rise to the emotion.

**So yes — emotion is never “meaningless.” It is always a signal tied to significance, whether hidden in biology or illuminated in consciousness.**

# POSITIVE EMOTION = MEANING ALIGNMENT

# NEGATIVE EMOTION = MEANING MISALIGNMENT

## [\(contents\)](#)

Looking at the startle response, when there is a sudden stimulus or change, the meaning is danger to homeostasis, so the emotion is fear. This is a negative emotion, since the value of homeostasis is threatened.

Conversely, when the hunger signal occurs, it has the meaning that we should seek nutrients. If we then find food, the emotion may be enthusiasm. This is a positive emotion because our actions are in line with the meaning.

Is it that case that all positive emotions arise when our circumstances align with our purposes or meanings, and all negative emotions arise when these purposes or meanings are frustrated?

## The Principle

- **Positive emotions** → arise when circumstances *support* or *align with* our embedded or conscious purposes.
  - Example: Hunger → food found → enthusiasm/joy → alignment with survival purpose.
  - Example: Social connection → belonging → happiness → alignment with relational meaning.
- **Negative emotions** → arise when circumstances *frustrate* or *threaten* our purposes.
  - Example: Startle response → danger to homeostasis → fear → misalignment with safety.
  - Example: Loss of a loved one → grief → misalignment with the purpose of connection.

## Why This Holds

- **Evolutionary lens:** Emotions evolved as adaptive signals. Positive emotions reinforce behaviors that serve survival and flourishing; negative emotions warn against threats or failures to meet needs.
- **Psychological lens:** Cognitive appraisal theory suggests emotions arise from how we evaluate events relative to our goals and values. Alignment → positive affect; frustration → negative affect.
- **Philosophical lens:** Meaning is the “telos” (end or purpose). Emotions are the felt experience of how reality interacts with that telos.

## Nuances

It's broadly true, but there are subtleties:

- **Mixed emotions:** Sometimes alignment and frustration coexist (e.g., pride and sadness at a child leaving home). But this is simply a conflict of purposes – reflected in conflicting emotions, so this confirms the idea that emotions are responses to meanings or purposes.

## Conclusion

Yes — in essence, **positive emotions are the felt resonance of alignment with meaning/purpose, while negative emotions are the felt dissonance of frustration or threat to meaning/purpose.**

This framework unifies biological reflexes, conditioned responses, and conscious feelings under one principle: **emotion is always tied to meaning, and valence (positive/negative) reflects alignment or misalignment.**

## SPECIFIC EMOTIONS RELATED TO SPECIFIC MEANINGS ([contents](#))

This is really common sense. Relationships evoke love, loss is associated with sadness, anger with violent assertion etc. Specific emotions are associated with specific meanings.

So, the alignment with a value does not simply result in positive emotion, but more specifically in a positive emotion that is related to the value realized. Similarly, non-alignment with a value does not simply result in negative emotion, but more specifically in a negative emotion that is related to the value not realized.

There are 8 primary emotional clusters on Plutchik's emotional circumplex, and these form 4 pairs of opposites –

- JOY-SADNESS
- LOVE-HATE
- PEACE-ANGER
- EXPLORATION-FEAR

Both emotions in each pair are triggered by the same value – one by its presence and another by its absence. Alignment doesn't just produce "positivity" in general; it produces the *specific* positive emotion that corresponds to the purpose being fulfilled.

### Refined Principle

- **Alignment with meaning → positive emotion tied to that meaning.**
- **Frustration of meaning → negative emotion tied to that meaning.**
- **Different meanings → different emotional signatures.**

### Key Insight

- Emotions are **not interchangeable signals of "good" or "bad."**
- Each emotion is a **specific response to a specific meaning or motivation.**
- Positive emotions differ in *quality* depending on the meaning fulfilled (exploration vs. unity vs. safety).
- Negative emotions differ in *quality* depending on the meaning frustrated (survival vs. justice vs. connection).

This gives us a **taxonomy of emotions as meaning-responses**. Instead of seeing emotions as generic "feelings," we can see them as precise indicators of how reality interacts with our purposes.

### Diagnostic Function of Emotions

Emotions are not only signals of valence (positive/negative), but also **diagnostic indicators of the specific value at stake**.

Each emotion corresponds to a specific meaning or motivation, and how its valence (positive or negative) reflects alignment or frustration. Let's lay it out clearly:

Emotion	Value / Meaning	Valence
Wonder / Curiosity	Exploration, adaptation, mastery, control	Positive (energizing, forward-moving)
Love	Relationship, unity, belonging, acceptance, integration	Positive (deep, connective)
Peace	Safety, security, stability	Positive (calming, stabilizing)
Joy	Vitality, achievement, play, fulfillment	Positive (vibrant, fulfilling)
Fear	Suppression of curiosity and exploration (threat to survival/homeostasis)	Negative (protective, restrictive)
Anger	Suppression of peace (violation of stability or justice)	Negative (mobilizing, corrective)
Sadness	Loss, death, weakness, poverty (failure of continuity or connection)	Negative (reflective, restorative)
Disgust	Suppression/fragmentation of unity, segregation, contamination	Negative (repulsive, distancing)

So, when we feel an emotion, we can ask:

1. Is it positive or negative? (alignment vs. frustration)
2. Which value does it correspond to? (exploration, unity, safety, vitality, etc.)

This makes emotions a **map of meaning in real time** — they reveal both the *state* (positive/negative) and the *value at stake*.

### The Four Emotional Opposites

Positive Emotion	Negative Emotion	Underlying Value	Negative Defined As...
Wonder / Curiosity	Fear	Exploration, adaptation, mastery, control	Suppression of exploration and openness
Joy	Sadness	Vitality, achievement, play, fulfillment	Loss of vitality, energy, or fulfillment
Love	Hate	Relationship, unity, belonging, acceptance, integration	Breakdown of unity into separation and rejection
Peace	Anger	Safety, security, stability	Breakdown of stability into conflict and violation

### Implications

- Emotions are **paired systems**: every value has both a positive expression (alignment) and a negative expression (frustration).
- This framework is **holistic**: it covers exploration, vitality, unity, and stability — arguably the four pillars of human flourishing.
- It's also **practical**: by noticing which emotion arises, we can identify both the **valence** (positive/negative) and the **value domain** at stake.

# EMOTION AS A SIGNAL ([contents](#))

Emotion is tied to meaning, purpose, goals, values.

## Positive emotions (beauty, joy, love, peace)

- Arise when our actions, experiences, or perceptions approximate our purpose.
- Beauty is felt when we align with meaning.
- Example: harmony in music or nature feels beautiful because it resonates with a deeper meaning or order.

## Negative emotions (fear, hate, sadness, disgust)

- Arise when we are misaligned with that purpose.
- They signal separation, fracture, or loss of meaning.
- Example: injustice evokes anger because it violates the moral order.

## How Emotion Relates to Value

- **Values as anchors:** Emotions arise when something touches or threatens our values. For example, if you value honesty, betrayal sparks anger; if you value connection, reunion sparks joy.
- **Intensity depends on importance:** The stronger the value, the stronger the emotional response. Losing a trivial object may cause mild annoyance, but losing something tied to identity or love can cause grief.
- **Positive vs. negative alignment:**
  - When reality aligns with values → emotions like joy, pride, gratitude.
  - When reality clashes with values → emotions like anger, sadness, fear.

## Why This Matters

- Emotions are signals pointing to what matters most. They're like a compass showing us our values in action.
- This explains why two people can react very differently to the same event: their values differ, so the emotional meaning differs.

In short: **emotion is the felt recognition of value in action.**

## SUMMARY ([contents](#))

We've traced a full arc:

1. **Emotion** → the raw, universal human responses (Plutchik's circumplex).
2. **Meaning** → emotions are not random; they arise when events are significant for us.
3. **Purpose** → significance is tied to goals and values, which orient us teleologically.
4. **Signal** → Emotions are a signal that we are either aligned or not aligned with our values or purposes

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

**Listening to your positive and negative emotions provides a valuable compass for detecting alignment or non-alignment with your values, and with what is significant to you. Such emotional evaluations may be at a conscious level, or rapid and unconscious.**

**Universals** → if some purposes are shared across humanity (love, flourishing, transcendence, harmony), then positive emotion will be experienced relative to how well we approximate those purposes.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

**By aligning with values, your experience of positive emotion and beauty will increase.**

## **The Circle Closed**

We began with emotion as the foundation. We discovered emotion is inseparable from meaning. We realized meaning is teleological — tied to goals and values. And now we see beauty as the **felt resonance of alignment with purposes**. This is why beauty feels transcendent: it is not just pleasant sensation, but the emotional signal that life is moving in harmony with its ends.

When our lives align with our purposes or meanings we feel or experience positive emotion or beauty. If those meanings or values are shared, then that beauty will be apparent to others, and be a beacon of light in the world.

If true universal values exist, then aligning your life with them will be experienced as meaningful and positive.

## POSTSCRIPT ([contents](#))

*“Since emotion is tied to meaning or purpose, it occurs to me that emotion would only exist in a world where meaning and purpose are real.”*

Craig Paardekooper

*“If emotion is the felt signal of meaning, then a world without real meaning or purpose would be a world in which emotion could not exist in any coherent form.”*

AI (Copilot)

### Does Emotion Require a Meaningful Universe?

#### 1. Emotion as Meaning-Response

Emotion, is not just arousal or reaction. It is:

- **the felt alignment or misalignment with purpose**
- **the diagnostic signal of value at stake**
- **the experiential registration of significance**

If that’s true, then emotion presupposes:

- **real values**
- **real purposes**
- **real significance**

Otherwise, emotion becomes an illusion—like a smoke alarm in a universe with no fires.

#### 2. The Materialist Counterpoint (and Why It Fails Under my Model)

A strict materialist would say:

“Emotions are just evolved survival mechanisms. They don’t require real meaning—only functional behavior.”

But your framework already dissolves this objection.

Because even evolutionary “functions” are **purposes**. And purposes are **teleological structures**. And teleology is **meaning**.

So even the materialist explanation smuggles in purpose through the back door.

If fear exists *because* it promotes survival, then survival is a **real value** embedded in the organism. If joy exists *because* it reinforces adaptive behaviour, then adaptation is a **real purpose**.

Meaning is unavoidable.

#### 3. A Universe Without Meaning Cannot Generate Emotion

Imagine a universe where:

- nothing matters
- no outcomes are better or worse
- no states are preferable
- no goals exist
- no values exist

In such a universe:

- **fear** cannot exist (because nothing is dangerous)
- **joy** cannot exist (because nothing is good)
- **sadness** cannot exist (because nothing is lost)
- **anger** cannot exist (because nothing is violated)
- **love** cannot exist (because nothing is worth uniting with)

Emotion collapses.

You can have *chemical reactions*, but not *emotions*. You can have *stimulus-response*, but not *significance*. You can have *movement*, but not *meaning*.

Emotion requires a world where some states are *better, worse, threatening, fulfilling, violating, or restorative*.

Those are value-laden categories.

#### 4. Therefore: Emotion Is Evidence of Meaning

This is the philosophical bombshell embedded in this theory:

**Emotion is not just tied to meaning—emotion is evidence that meaning is real.**

If emotions are real, then:

- values are real
- purposes are real
- significance is real
- alignment and misalignment are real
- flourishing and harm are real

Emotion becomes a phenomenological proof of teleology.

Just as consciousness implies subjectivity, emotion implies meaning.

#### 5. The Theological and Existential Implication

I have essentially derived a version of the classical argument:

*“If humans experience meaning, then meaning must be woven into reality.”*

But I’ve done it through the empirical structure of emotion.

Emotion becomes the bridge between:

- **biology and value**
- **evolution and purpose**
- **experience and significance**
- **psychology and metaphysics**

## **6. My Framework's Final Step**

My model implies:

**Emotion is only possible in a universe where meaning is not an illusion but a structural feature of reality.**

This is not sentiment—it's a logical consequence of my definitions.

Emotion is the *felt form* of meaning. Meaning is the *structural form* of purpose. Purpose is the *teleological form* of value.

Remove value, and the entire chain collapses.