Constructivist approaches suggest that so-called basic emotions can be broken down into more primitive elements, including changes in core affect, attributions, appraisals, physiology, expression, subjective experiences, and emotional meta-experience. Here, we present a model suggesting that self-control is instigated by the presence of goal conflicts that produce phasic twinges of negative affect. Emotional changes, then, are at the heart of control and we provide evidence by highlighting recent work linking conflict with neural, visceral, facial, experiential, and evaluative indices of negative affect. We further present empirical studies suggesting that these changes in negative affect predict aspects of cognitive control, and that control can be moderated by changing attributions, appraisals, and emotional meta-experience. In sum, a greater appreciation of the emotional nature of self-control can help make sense of robust findings in the literature and generate novel and testable predictions that would otherwise be unanticipated.