

1

**INTRODUCTION:
THE PHILOSOPHICAL
SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTION****1.1 Introduction**

Emotions are cool. As a target of philosophical investigation, emotions are interesting not only because they engage so many philosophical issues—in metaphysics, the philosophy of science, epistemology, and value theory—but also because we are so intimately familiar with them: we see emotions in ourselves, in others, and even in our pets. Emotions are also a topic of significant inquiry across the social and cognitive sciences—not to mention literature and the arts. This makes them an exciting target for interdisciplinary research. In fact, studying emotions in a cross-disciplinary manner has been fruitful—especially with regard to questions about the nature of emotions and their relevance for our understanding of human agency. So, it’s no wonder that we’ve seen a significant increase in interest in emotions from philosophers, scientists, and beyond.

But what’s distinctive about a *philosophical* investigation of emotion as opposed to the forms of inquiry we might find in other disciplines? Although the answer to this question will become clearer as we progress, we can start by thinking about how the methods and targets of emotion research differ across disciplines. A philosophical investigation of emotion probes at the nature and value of emotion using the tools of conceptual analysis (often as shaped by work in other disciplines). This then contrasts with, for instance, discussions of emotion in literature, linguistics, anthropology, and the cognitive sciences.

Oversimplifying a bit, a central aim of discussions of emotion in literature (and the arts more generally) is to provide us with rich, evocative depictions of both the lived experience of emotional life and the significance that emotions have for ourselves and our connections with others. By contrast, emotion research from anthropologists and linguists uses ethnography and linguistic analysis to uncover the cultural-historic roots of emotion terms and concepts, including things like how languages differ in the ways that they describe and categorize aspects of emotional life as well as how a group’s distinctive emotion terms/concepts might shape the emotions that group members feel and how they understand themselves and the world they’re in. Finally, work in psychology and cognitive science seeks to understand things like the causal mechanisms (e.g., neural structures and chemical pathways) that underlie emotion; they also investigate how emotions are shaped—in the moment and developmentally—by other (non-emotional) systems, learning, and the environment more generally.

Of course, the boundaries between these disciplinary approaches are blurry—in part because each discipline makes use of the findings of the others. Although this overlap brings challenges (e.g., how to make sense of distinctive research methodologies and how to reconcile difference in the ways that

emotion terms are used and translated), it also brings exciting opportunities for researchers to advance our understanding of emotion.

In this book, we embark on a systematic *philosophical* investigation of emotion—though one that’s informed by work in the social and cognitive sciences. To do this, we will focus on two very broad questions: What are emotions? And in what ways might emotions be valuable? More specifically, in Chapters 2–4, we will wrestle with questions about the nature of emotion. When we feel anger or pride, what kind of mental or physiological state are we experiencing? Relatedly, what are the characteristic features of emotions: Is it the way they make us feel? The way they make us think and act? Something else? Adding to this, we can ask what makes emotions like fear, anger, sadness, and grief the distinct emotions that they are as well as what makes emotions different from things like moods or bodily sensations such as hunger and itches. Broadening our discussion, we will also ask how we might explain the differences in the ways that people from different cultures think and talk about emotions. And we’ll explore whether emotions are things that cats, dogs, and groundhogs can experience.

In Chapters 5–8, we turn to our second big project: exploring the ways in which emotions might be valuable. For instance, are emotions like joy and love experiences that make our lives better? What about anxiety and disgust—might these emotions also be valuable? Or are they so unpleasant that we’d be better off not experiencing them at all? Similarly, might emotions like rage and jealousy be too violent to be things we should want to experience? Thinking about the bigger picture, we will explore the role that emotions might play in making us better (or worse) people—be it in the ways that we think and reason (as with curiosity perhaps), the ways we treat others (compassion, disgust, and envy), and how we feel about ourselves (pride and guilt). We’ll also explore the role that emotions might play both in grounding evaluative concepts like the SHAMEFUL and the AMUSING and in providing us with epistemic access to the evaluative properties associated with particular emotions (fear and danger, sadness and loss).¹

In the rest of this introductory chapter, we will look at some examples of everyday emotions (Section 1.2) in order to set the stage for a more systematic discussion of both what a good theory of emotion should do and what role research in the social and cognitive sciences might play in philosophical discussions about the nature and value of emotion (Sections 1.3 and 1.4). We will conclude with a brief preview of the topics that we’ll cover in the balance of the book (Section 1.5).

1.2 Starting places: emotions and why they matter

To begin to draw out some of the richness and intrigue of emotions, consider the following examples.

(1) *Fear*. The Grand Canyon Skywalk is a glass platform that extends 70 feet out over the Grand Canyon. For those who take the stroll, the Walk provides a view of the Colorado River and the canyon floor far below. It’s a major tourist attraction not just because of the spectacular view it provides but also because of *how* it provides that view: you see the bottom of the canyon—4,000 feet beneath you!—through the glass panel you’re standing on.

Whereas many find walking the platform thrilling, some are terrified—and these emotional responses bring very different behaviors. The thrilled don’t want to leave the platform and the terrified don’t want to step on it. But there’s a further curiosity: those who are afraid experience their fear even though they know that the Skywalk is perfectly safe. So safe, in fact, that it can survive an

8.0-magnitude earthquake, withstand 100-mph winds, and support the weight of 71 fully loaded 747 airplanes! Consider, as one example of the fear that the thought of walking the platform brings for some, the following comment on the tourist information website, Trip Advisor: “Amazing and scary. Afraid of depth. Walked holding rail ... I know it is safe, but ... Should try it at least once, if afraid.”

Switching gears a bit, my dog Jake wouldn’t be scared at all to stand on the Skywalk—he’s unfazed by the steep cliffs we explore on our hikes. But thunderstorms ... that’s a completely different matter. They leave him a fearful, shaking mess hiding in the basement. Given all this, what can we say about who really feels fear (humans, dogs, fruit flies ...) and why they fear what they do (something in their genes, a bad experience ...)? And what might answers to these questions tell us about what fear is? Relatedly, these examples suggest that fear is a response to danger. But if we feel it when we’re perfectly safe, is it really a valuable or rational response?

Pushing further, consider, not fears of Skywalks and thunderstorms, but insects. In particular, consider the familiar meme of the housewife terrified of the cockroach in the kitchen. There she is, screaming as she waits for her husband to come and kill the bug. What we have here is an unfortunate, gendered stereotype: woman as fearful and fragile, man as the fearless protector. Of course, we can easily recognize the problems with memes like this when they are pointed out in the context of an academic conversation. But emotion-based stereotypes of this sort often operate under the surface, affecting our interactions with others (how we think about them and how we act toward them). Sometimes the influence of emotion stereotypes is innocuous, but often it isn’t. Stereotyping women as fearful and fragile—and so in need of protection—or Black men as angry and so dangerous has the potential to do real and lasting damage to the lives and livelihood of these individuals. Here we see how questions about fear’s value are complicated by our (stereotyped) beliefs about when emotions should be felt and by whom.

(2) *Compassion and love.* When Ari Mahler heard about the 11 people who were killed in the mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue on October 27, 2018, he was worried that his parents might have been two of the victims. But Mahler was also a trauma nurse at the Allegheny General Hospital. So when the ambulance carrying Robert Bowers—the gunman from the synagogue shooting—arrived, Mahler went to work. He did his job, tending to Bowers’s wounds, and did so from feelings compassion and love. It didn’t matter to Mahler, a Jew and the son of a rabbi, that the man whose wounds he was treating had just killed nearly a dozen others—yelling “Death to all Jews!” as he started shooting. It didn’t matter that Bowers deserved the wounds (he was shot by the police in an effort to stop the rampage). Rather, in explaining why he acted as he did, Mahler pointed to his emotions and the power they have:

Love. That’s why I did it. Love as an action is more powerful than words, and love in the face of evil gives others hope. It demonstrates humanity. It reaffirms why we’re all here. The meaning of life is to give meaning to life, and love is the ultimate force that connects all living beings. (Flynn 2018)

If you’re like me, you likely find Mahler’s words and actions inspiring. You might also (again, like me) find it difficult to see how you could have done the same thing if in his shoes: how could I feel compassion (much less love) for someone who did something so horrible? In fact, research by cognitive scientists suggests that this isn’t unusual. That is, compassion is an emotion we’re more likely to feel in response to the suffering of someone *we know* than a stranger. But, equally

noteworthy, it also appears that we can broaden the circle of people we feel compassion towards through, for instance, practices like Buddhist mindfulness training where we learn to break down barriers between our thoughts of ourselves and thoughts of others—even strangers and our enemies.

Compassion, then, reveals something both about the moral power of emotions and how empirical work can help us cultivate morally beneficial emotions. But although compassion gives us a glimpse of the good that emotions can do, the picture of emotions' moral significance is more complex, as we'll see when we turn to disgust.

(3) *Disgust*. If you've ever had food poisoning, you know that the mere sight (or smell) of the food that made you sick can bring back strong feelings of disgust. In fact, researchers have given this phenomenon a name—the Garcia Effect. It refers to our tendency to develop powerful disgust sensitivities to things that have made us sick, sensitivities that we can acquire very quickly. Sometimes *just one* unfortunate experience is enough. These features of disgust are thought to reveal something about disgust's evolutionary origins: it's thought to show that disgust is an emotion we've developed in order to protect ourselves against poisons and pathogens in the things we might eat or touch.

But related research suggests that disgust isn't a very accurate response. For instance, if we've developed a disgust sensitivity as the result of the bad tuna salad we ate, we'll avoid eating it again. But that means we'll pass up opportunities for all that nutritious (and delicious) tuna salad that hasn't gone bad. More troubling, it turns out that the things that the Garcia Effect makes us sensitive to aren't always the things that actually made us sick (e.g., it wasn't really the tuna salad that made me ill but rather the stomach bug that was going around the office). Thus, in disgust, we have a useful—but flawed—emotion: a tool that imperfectly protects us against biological contaminants.

But disgust also has a moral dimension. As William Miller, professor of law and history, explains,

there are those vices and offenses for which notions of ugliness, smelliness, sliminess readily apply and those for which they do not. Hypocrisy, betrayal, cruelty put us in the swamp of the disgusting, and no other moral sentiment seems as well qualified to express our disapprobation. (1998: 205)

Given Miller's observation, it's no surprise that some of the most commonly mentioned objects of disgust are things like stealing, taking advantage of the elderly, and cheating.

All this seems like good news. But we need to be careful about what conclusions we draw about disgust's moral value. After all, we've seen that the disgust sensitivities we acquire can be inaccurate. This means we can become disgusted by things that are not morally problematic (e.g., disgust toward inter-racial marriage). Additionally, as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum explains, history is full of examples of individuals (e.g., women and Jews) being portrayed as having stock disgust properties—being diseased, dirty, or smelly—for the purpose of eliciting disgust in their persecutors (2004:107–15). If that's not bad enough, empirical work suggests that, unlike compassion, disgust *resists* our efforts to correct it or shape it for the better.

So what are we to make of all this? For instance, what can we say about the value of disgust—is it an emotion that we would be better off without? Moreover, given the contrasts that we’ve seen between compassion and disgust, is there anything we can say about the value of emotions *in general*?

(4) *Reactive attitudes: anger, shame, and gratitude.* Certain emotions appear to play a distinctive role in our interactions with each other. Notice, for instance, that although we can be afraid or disgusted by inanimate objects (the green, slimy thing we found on bread we’re eating), emotions like anger, shame, and gratitude are things that it seems appropriate to feel only toward *people*. In fact, emotions like these seem to have been set up to track the moral quality of our actions: we feel grateful when someone helps us out, resentful when they intentionally hurt us, and shame when we fail to live up to other’s (or our own) expectations. Observations like these suggest that these emotions, which often get called “reactive attitudes,” are central to our thinking about moral responsibility—our assessments of who is worthy of praise and who deserves blame for what they’ve done. But what, more specifically, is the role that these emotions play? Are they just ways that we reward and punish others for their actions (the praise of gratitude, the admonishment of resentment)? Or is the connection deeper? That is, should we understand *responsibility itself* in terms of these emotions: to be a morally responsible agent *just is* to be someone who can be the target of reactive attitudes? This, as we’ll see, is an influential—but highly controversial—philosophical proposal.

Pushing things in a different direction, what are we to make of cultures like the Utkuhikhalingmiut Eskimos, whose concept of anger is very different from what we seem to be referring to with the English word *anger*. For the Utkuhikhalingmiut, anger is something that one should try *not* to feel even if one has been slighted or deliberately hurt by someone else (Briggs 1970; Hippler 1974). Clearly, the Utkuhikhalingmiut perspective on anger contrasts sharply with what we see in much of Western philosophy. Aristotle, for instance, maintained that someone who doesn’t get angry when one of her friends is disrespected is a *fool* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.5).

This discussion of reactive attitudes reveals an added layer of complexity to our thinking about the nature and value of emotion. In particular, it suggests that what conclusion we draw about the value of an emotion like anger might turn on what cross-cultural research and philosophical theorizing tell us about what anger is.

(5) *Curiosity.* When we’re curious about something—the answer to a crossword puzzle, say—our attention automatically shifts to the thing we’re curious about. We also start thinking more and more about what the answer might be. More generally, curiosity is often thought to be a powerful driver of inquiry: we would not know much of what we know were it not for our curiosity. We also take curiosity to be an admirable trait, something we want to see in people—be they philosophers, scientists, or crossword puzzle enthusiasts.

But how are we to reconcile these positive aspects of curiosity with what we see in our curious neighbor—that nosy guy who is always poking around in other people’s business? In light of people like him, can we really say that curiosity is an intellectual or epistemic *virtue*? Might it just be an emotion that directs our attention to what’s novel or unknown (like your boss’s salary or the latest juicy tidbit about that celebrity you love to hate)?

More generally, should we even claim that curiosity is an emotion? Sure, we say things like “I’m feeling curious.” But does curiosity actually have a distinctive *feel*—something on par with the glow of pride or the nausea of disgust? And even if there is a distinctive way that we feel when we’re

curious, does that make it an emotion? After all, we also feel pains, tickles, and hunger—but, surely, those aren't emotions. All this raises questions about both what makes an emotion an emotion (rather than, say, a desire or a bodily sensation) and what makes a particular emotion the emotion that it is.

With these five examples in hand, we now have a taste for the richness and complexity of the emotions we experience. With that done, we can turn to the second project of the chapter.

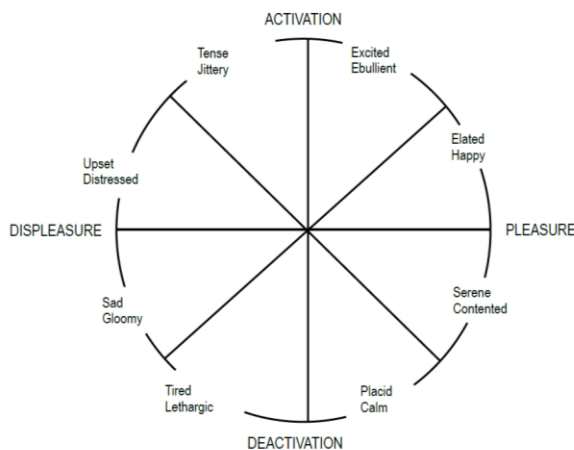
1.3 Methodology: what a good theory of emotion should do

The above exploration of the richness and complexity of emotion positions us to ask an important question: What do we want a theory of emotion to explain? What, that is, makes a theory of emotion a *good* theory? Broadly speaking, we can identify seven general features of emotions and our experience of them. These will serve as our starting place for thinking about what we want from a theory of emotion.

(1) *Phenomenology*. When we experience an emotion, it feels a certain way and we often characterize these feelings metaphorically: the *heat* of anger, the *trembling terror* of fear, the *wistfulness* of nostalgia. We want a philosophical account to explain why particular emotions feel the way that they do. Digging deeper, there are at least three aspects to the phenomenology of emotion that we would want explained.

First, emotional experiences are typically seen as combining two affective elements: arousal and valence. *Arousal* falls along a scale from a sense of being activated or energized (as with anger or joy) to a sense of being deactivated (as with sadness or contentment). *Valence* captures the hedonic tone of our emotional experiences. It can be thought of in terms of a scale that runs from pleasant (as with pride and amusement) to unpleasant (shame and disgust). The combination of arousal and valence is sometimes called “core affect,” and it's thought that every emotional experience will display some combination of these two features (see Figure 1.1). Of course, particular emotions can show some variability along these dimensions. For instance, one's anger can come with moderate or high levels of arousal. Similarly, although fear is typically experienced as unpleasant (negative valence), this isn't always so (the pleasurable fear of the roller coaster). Additionally, some emotions like curiosity or nostalgia will usually be experienced as fairly neutral on both dimensions.

Fig 1.1 Core Affect



Second, when we experience an emotion, we typically also experience various *bodily changes*, changes that seem to differ from emotion to emotion. In anger, for instance, we might feel an increase in our heart rate and an adrenalin surge; for embarrassment, we experience the heat in our cheeks as our blood vessels open and we start to blush; for disgust, we may feel constrictions in our stomach as we prepare to purge what we just ate. Moreover, although these physiological changes are likely (partly) responsible for the changes in core affect that we noted above, they seem distinct at the level of our felt experience of them. We can, for instance, distinguish the unpleasantness of disgust from the associated constrictions we feel in our stomach.

Finally, emotions are felt as things that happen to us rather than things that we decide to do or experience. Granted, we can put ourselves in situations that are likely to make us feel a certain emotion (recalling an insult in order to get oneself angry). But this is not the way we typically experience our emotions—typically, they are things that we *passively experience*.

(2) *Connection to motivation*. Our emotions tend to move us: we *embrace* those we love, we *confront* those who make us angry, we *reject* what disgusts us. But although our emotions seem to be intimately connected to our actions, the details of this connection are subtle and sophisticated. Here, too, there are three things to notice.

First, emotions don't just move us. As the above examples reveal, they move us in specific ways. When I embarrass myself in front of my friends, I want to escape from that unfortunate situation; when you feel admiration for a politician or someone devoted to fighting against injustice, you want to engage with that person and the cause that they're working for. But there's subtlety here. Emotions move us in ways that are *situationally sensitive* in the sense that how we act is sensitive to the circumstances we're in. For instance, although I may feel moved to escape when I embarrassed myself while making a public presentation, I might nonetheless soldier on with the talk I'm giving. Similarly, although anger inclines us toward aggression, whether we aggress (and what exact form the aggression takes) seems to turn on features of our situation. When angry at our boss, we're pulled to tell him off, but we might nonetheless hold back given the recognition that responding in this way would only make the situation worse.

Second, the motivational connection for some emotions often takes the form of *inaction* as our emotions keep us from engaging in the ways we would if we weren't feeling them. For instance, sadness, contentment, and nostalgia don't typically get us to do anything; rather, they're emotions whose motivational connection seems to bring things like inhibition, disengagement, and withdrawal. Finally, as with phenomenology, the connection between emotions and particular motivations is likely tied to the distinctive physiological changes they bring. If anger motivates aggression, we should expect our bodies to be preparing for confrontation when we get mad; if disgust prompts a reject/purge response, we should expect the associated bodily changes in the gastrointestinal track. Moreover, these preparations typically bring distinctive expressive behavior—facial expressions (the wide eyes of fear), vocalizations (the giggle of amusement), and body posture (the slumped shoulders of shame).

(3) *Intentionality*. Intentionality is a philosophical term used to refer to phenomena that *have content*. An intentional state, then, is a mental state that is *about something*. So understood, emotions seem to be intentional states: they are states that have content or are about something. Moreover, the content of an emotion is standardly thought to be *evaluative* content. The fear that I feel when I see

the snake is about *the dangerousness of the snake*. The pride you experience after your talk is about *the successfulness of your presentation*. The shame that Eugene feels about his behavior is about *the shameful of what he did*. As these examples suggests, this talk of value is understood broadly: both the positive (the success of pride) and the negative (the dangerousness of fear) count as evaluative content.²

Importantly, the content of an emotion is different from what caused it. Although content and cause will often overlap, they can come apart. My anger at your comment is *about* what you said, even if its underlying *cause* was the low blood sugar I have from skipping lunch. In having content and not just causes, emotions are different from reflexes (although my eye blink was *caused* by the loud noise, it's not *about* the noise). It also puts emotions on par with other intentional states: my belief that it will rain is about the impending storm, my desire for the brownie is about the dessert. To help flesh out the common idea that emotions have content, a couple of distinctions will be helpful.

First, there's the distinction between what are called the material and formal objects of an emotion. The *material object* of an emotion is the thing that our emotions are directed toward, whereas the *formal object* gives our emotions their evaluative dimension. Consider an illustration. Suppose I'm afraid of the dog but you find her amusing. The material object of our emotions is the same—namely the dog. But the formal objects of our emotions differ: my fear presents the dog as *dangerous* whereas your amusement presents her as *funny*.³

Seeing that emotions have formal objects will be significant for the discussions to come. For starters, it reveals that emotions have a special connection to values and evaluations—both good evaluations/values (as with the amusing) and bad ones (the dangerous). Moreover, this suggests that we might distinguish emotions in terms of their formal objects or characteristic evaluations. That is, part of what makes fear and amusement different is that they're concerned with different values (respectively, what's dangerous and amusing).⁴

The second distinction is between an *emotion* and the *cognitive base* of that emotion. A distinctive feature of emotions is that they (and so their content) seem to always be dependent on some other mental state—be it a perception, a memory, or an imagining. For instance, in order for me to be angry about your comment, I must hear, remember, or imagine that you made the comment. By contrast, my visual perception of the dog isn't dependent on another mental state in this way: when I visually perceive the rottweiler in front of me, I *just see* the dog—no additional, intervening mental state is needed.

(4) *Individuation*. The discussion of the intentionality of emotion hints at a further feature that we want a theory of emotion to explain—namely how we are to individuate or categorize emotions. Here, there are three distinct projects. The first is to explain what, if anything, makes emotions distinct from other affective states. Intuitively, emotions are different from things like moods, feelings of pleasure and pain, and bodily sensations like hunger or thirst. But what makes emotions different? After all, bad moods, pains, and hungers all seem to be emotion-like in the sense that they can be described as states that involve a combination of arousal and valence, tend to motivate us in distinctive ways, and have content (pain is about tissue damage, hunger is about a caloric deficiency).

Second, there's the project of explaining what makes particular emotions unique—how is anger different from disgust, and how is sadness different from grief? This project becomes more complicated once we take note of the substantial variation in the way emotions are talked about

across cultures. Consider a couple of examples. The Japanese appear to have a distinct emotion—*amae*. *Amae* is something that one feels when one needs to be loved by another person. Is this a distinct emotion that only the Japanese have? Or is it just a variation on something more familiar (affection or sadness, say)? In a similar vein, the Yankunytjatjara of central Australia have three emotion terms that bear some relation to the English word *anger*. Yet each of these terms focuses narrowly (what, in English, we might refer to as different types of anger); moreover, the combination of them doesn't capture all that seems to be meant by the English *anger*. So what, exactly, is anger the emotion? Is it what English speakers mean by *anger*, or what the Yankunytjatjara mean with some/all of their terms? Or is it something else altogether?

The final individuation project concerns what we should say about Jake's fear of thunderstorms and the emotions of non-human animals more generally. Is Jake's "fear" really *fear*, or is it something else—a "proto-emotion" or a mere defensive response? These questions reveal that a good theory of emotions will help us understand whether non-human animals can experience emotions. If they cannot, then why is that the case—what capacities do they lack? But if they can, then what emotions can they feel? Perhaps a dog like Jake can feel fear, but it's harder to think he feels nostalgia for those good old days as a puppy.

(5) *Cognition and epistemology*. As we've seen, emotions bring physiological changes and motivations to act. But they also affect our cognitions: emotions shape where we focus our attention, what sorts of inferences we draw, and what beliefs we form. Consider an example. Just as Maria settles under the covers, she hears a loud crash in the living room below. She bolts up in bed afraid. As a result of her fear, Maria strains her ears trying to hear if there are more noises. She starts wondering whether her daughter might have come home earlier than she expected or whether the wind might have blown over the vase by the window. She thinks: "I'm in danger!"

A good theory of emotions will help us understand why emotions affect our cognitive processes in these ways. But we want it to do more. Notice, for instance, the belief, "I'm in danger," that comes along with Maria's fear. Here we can ask how these two things are connected. One possibility is that Maria's fear caused her belief; another is that the belief caused the fear. But in addition to these *causal* connections, might there be an *epistemological* tie? In particular, might Maria's fear *justify* her belief that she is in danger in the sense that the fact that she is afraid provides her with a *reason to believe* that she is in danger? If so, then emotions are, epistemically speaking, like sensory perceptions—just like seeing the blueness of the vase justifies your belief that the vase is blue, Maria's fear justifies her belief that she is in danger.

(6) *Value*. The discussion so far has revealed that there's an intimate connection between emotions and values. Illuminating the nature of this connection is another task we'd want a theory of emotion to address. On this front, there are (at least) two projects.

The first concerns explaining the ways in which emotions are valuable. The disgust that keeps you from (again) eating something that made you sick appears to be *instrumentally valuable*—a mechanism that protects you against harmful pathogens. But the discussion of compassion and curiosity suggests that emotions, or at least some of them, might be valuable in a deeper way. Compassion's connection to the suffering of others suggests it may be a *morally valuable* emotion—an emotion that can help make one a better person. And curiosity's role in driving inquiry and discovery suggests it may be *epistemically* or *intellectually valuable*. But we've also seen that claims about the (instrumental, moral, epistemic) value of emotions are complicated by that fact that our emotions can run awry,

distorting—sometimes badly—both how we perceive our situation and the manner in which we respond. We’ve seen a glimpse of these issues in the above discussions of our curious but nosy neighbor as well as disgust-driven bigotry and sexism.

The second project takes up something that was hinted at in the discussion of reactive attitudes like anger, shame, and gratitude. Given how intimate the connection is between certain emotions (amusement, shame, disgust, fear) and the associated concepts (the AMUSING, the SHAMEFUL, the DISGUSTING, the FEARSOME), we might think that there is a constitutive relationship between these concepts and the associated emotions. That is, we might think that, without the emotion (shame), we would not have the associated concept (the shameful). If so, then some version of metaethical *sentimentalism* may be the best way to understand the connection between emotions and our evaluative concepts. But even if we reject sentimentalism, there’s still the project of providing an account of our moral psychology—one that explains why emotions and values (or value concepts) are so intimately connected.

(7) *Rationality and virtue.* Recall the example of the person who was afraid to go on the Grand Canyon Skywalk even though he knew it was completely safe. Situations of this sort—that is, situations where our emotions seem to conflict with our considered judgments—are familiar features of ordinary life. Jamie’s anger at his girlfriend persists even after he realizes that he misunderstood the situation; Ditte remains disgusted by the dog poop-shaped fudge even though she knows it’s gourmet-quality stuff. Philosophers call emotions like these “recalcitrant emotions,” and they’re generally thought to show how our emotions can be *irrational*. Recalcitrant emotions are irrational because we expect them to “correct” themselves given our reasoned assessments that they’re misplaced—but they don’t.

To see this, first notice that, as with perceptual experiences, emotional experiences can be *inaccurate*: just as I can see the stick in the water as being bent when it isn’t, I can be afraid of a spider that isn’t dangerous. But we expect our emotions, unlike perceptual illusions, to correct themselves when we deem them to be misplaced (and they often do). So, when my fear of the spider persists—that is, when it becomes a recalcitrant fear—it seems to be an irrational fear. By contrast, when my perception of the stick as bent persists even after I realize that it’s straight, we don’t deem my perception to be irrational. Perceptual experiences—unlike emotional experiences—aren’t mental states that we expect to self-correct in this sort of way.

In a related vein, recall the earlier discussion of compassion. There we saw that certain types of mindfulness training can help one become more—and more appropriately—compassionate. In this way, compassion seems different from disgust; unlike compassion, disgust appears to resist being corrected. Here we have a set of questions that we’d want a theory of emotion to help us understand. In what ways can emotions be subject to truth-or appropriateness-conditions? To what extent are emotions things that we can shape for the better? And what lessons does an answer to that question provide about related issues regarding emotional—and so moral—development? After all, if we presume (as many philosophers do) that becoming a more virtuous person involves shaping one’s emotions so that they are experienced at the right time and in the right way, then how should we revise our views about virtue if it turns out that some emotions, like disgust or shame, are difficult (and perhaps impossible) to change? Is, for instance, the racist’s disgust less vicious or less morally problematic if it’s a reflex-like emotional response he cannot control? (Compare: do we think the curses and slurs made by someone with Tourette syndrome are a sign of a vicious character or a symptom of a morally innocuous disability?)

* * *

With these seven features of emotion in hand, let's return to the big picture. The best theory of emotion will presumably be the one that can explain all of these features: it will capture the above observations and intuitions about emotions and do so in a way that meshes with what social and cognitive science tells us about emotion and the human mind and body more generally. In all likelihood, however, no theory will be able to do this. After all, as is often the case in philosophy, our pre-theoretical ideas and intuitions about a topic are a messy, conflicting hodgepodge. So, part of the task in assessing competing theories of emotion will involve thinking about which of the above seven considerations seem most important for a theory to explain. Perhaps, on reflection or with the benefit of empirical data, we might conclude that the thought of emotions as necessarily felt experiences or essentially motivating is misleading.

Complicating matters further, our seven features are somewhat vague. For instance, what, specifically, does it mean to say that emotions have an “intimate connection” to motivation? Does that mean that it would be *impossible* to have an emotion without an accompanying motivation? As another example, consider individuation: it maintains (plausibly) that there are distinct types of emotions (fear, disgust, nostalgia) and that emotions are different from moods and itches. But are the lines between these states sharp, or do emotions blend into one another (as we might think with sadness and grief)? Recognizing these nuances reveals that philosophers can disagree about both what exactly needs to be explained and what an adequate explanation of it involves.

As we start to consider particular theories and claims about emotion, it will be good to keep in mind these seven features of emotion (and our associated methodological observations). It will also be important to think about how answers to questions about what emotions are might inform our understanding of their value and how insights about the value of emotion might inform our understanding of the nature of emotion. At the end of the book (Sections 9.2 and 9.3), we will return to these seven features to see what light our investigation sheds on them.

1.4 The relevance of the social and cognitive sciences

Philosophical thinking about emotion is shaped by work in the social and cognitive sciences. This empirical work is, in turn, informed by philosophical views about the nature and value of emotions. In fact, this interplay between philosophical theorizing and empirical investigation has long been a prominent part of emotion research. Consider three examples.

First, the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome took emotions to be mental states that undermined moral development. Because of this, they thought we needed to rid ourselves of emotions' influence on our thoughts and actions. On this front, they developed a wide range of techniques for silencing and extirpating emotions' influence—techniques that were based on their systematic observations and studies of human psychology. The Stoics also wrote treatises, like Seneca's *On Anger*, that detailed how we should try to respond to specific emotions, and these treatises have parallels to—not to mention influence on!—the treatment protocols that we see in contemporary clinical psychology.

Second, in his 1872 work, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin discussed the biological foundations of emotions. He argued that certain human emotions have their origins in the behavior of the evolutionary ancestors that we share with other (non-human) animals. To defend

this, he first noted that certain distinct, basic emotion types—fear, grief, disgust, and anger, among others—come with characteristic facial expressions which are universal in the sense that, for instance, the same “disgust” expressions is made by all human beings. To this he added that similar expressions can also be found in non-human animals: “the young and the old of widely different races, both with man and animals, express the same state of mind by the same movements” (1872/1965: 352). Moreover, a version of Darwin’s core proposal—what’s often called “affect program” theory—is a research program that continues to be pursued by philosophers and cognitive scientists today (more on this in Chapter 3).

Finally, in the late 1800s, William James and Karl Lange developed what’s called the feeling theory of emotion. According to James and Lange, emotions are nothing more than our conscious experiences of certain physiological changes; fear, for instance, just is the feeling of one’s muscles tightening and one’s heart rate accelerating. But the James–Lange view was soon challenged by empirical observations made by the physiologist Walter Cannon (1927). He noted that individuals with spinal cord damage—damage that severely limited their ability to feel what was happening to their bodies—still had rich emotional lives, a finding that is hard to make sense of using the James–Lange account of what emotions are.

From these examples and the larger discussion of this chapter, we see that work in the social and cognitive sciences is relevant for a range of issues in the philosophy of emotion, including our understanding of cross-cultural difference in emotion terms and concepts as well as the evolutionary roots of our emotional capacities. We also see that emotion science can help us test empirical commitments of philosophical theories and enrich our understanding emotional development and its connection to human agency. But the insights flow in the other direction too. For instance, work in philosophy brings conceptual refinement that can help us better understand differences between emotion types (sadness vs. grief, shame vs. guilt) as well as distinctions between emotion, moods, and other forms of affect. Philosophical work also allows us to connect empirical findings about emotion to questions about issues like the moral value of anger, the epistemic credentials of curiosity, and the ways that emotions give meaning to our lives.

1.5 The project to come: seven questions about emotions

We now have a sense for both what the philosophical study of emotions involves and what we want from a good theory of emotion. Building from this, the book is structured around seven questions that will allow us to investigate emotions from a variety of different philosophical perspectives. Here’s a quick preview of the coming attractions.

Metaphysics: What are emotions? In Chapter 2, we will explore debates about the nature of emotion by looking at three of the leading contemporary theories: *cognitive views* that take emotions to be a distinctive type of evaluative judgment, *perceptual theories* that understand emotions as special ways of seeing the evaluative features of the world, and *motivational accounts* that take emotions to be ways of responding to particular threats and opportunities. As we will see, each of these proposals takes a different aspect of emotional experience to be central to our understanding of what emotions are. But we will also see that these assumptions can be challenged, in various ways, by looking at how emotions are understood by non-Western traditions.

Philosophy of science: Are emotions natural kinds? Chapter 3 continues the discussion of the nature of emotion but does so from the perspective of the philosophy of science. Here the central focus is on questions of individuation. More specifically, the question of whether emotion categories

(amusement, fear, anger, pride, etc.) are natural kinds—that is, categories that pick out the fundamental features of the world in the way that scientific categories like “electron” and “neuron” seem to do. We will also consider whether emotion categories might be better understood as socially or culturally created categories like “birthday cake” and “tuba”—categories that don’t reflect the fundamental features of the world (as natural kinds do) but that, instead, are grounded in our cultural practices. As with Chapter 2, part of our investigation will explore how non-Western cultures think and talk about emotions.

Comparative cognition: Do animals have emotions? Chapter 4, the final chapter focused on questions about the nature of emotion, looks at situations where we seem to see evidence of emotions in non-human animals—for example, anxiety in rats, jealousy in dogs, grief in elephants—in order to understand whether emotion is a uniquely human phenomenon. Here we see that the answer turns, in part, on what we take emotions to be. If, for instance, emotions are conceptually rich, felt experiences, then are they things that non-human animals can experience? Even if we say yes, challenging epistemological and empirical questions remain. (For example, how do we determine whether a squirrel has the concept danger or *feels* worried?)

Epistemology: Are emotions epistemically valuable? An area of philosophical work on emotion that has received significant attention of late concerns the epistemological role of emotions. In Chapter 5, we take up two important questions on this front. The first question asks whether emotions can be sources of justification. For instance, does the fear I feel about the aggressively barking dog *provide evidence* that supports my belief that the dog is dangerous? Or is my fear, instead, merely a reaction to the dog’s aggression? The second question turns to work in feminist epistemology. Here we will look at the role that emotions play in our thinking about epistemic injustice and the ways that emotions can diminish—as well as enhance—the epistemic credentials of marginalized individuals.

Metaethics: Are emotions the foundation for value and morality? Chapter 6 is the first of three chapters focused on the role of emotions in ethical theory. As we have already noted, emotions bear a tight connection to morals and values. Here we explore this connection by critically examining the sentimentalists’ claim that moral/evaluative concepts and properties are grounded in our emotions. In one version of this influential proposal, for something to be wrong *just is* for it to be connected (in the right sort of way) to feelings of disapproval; similarly, for something to be amusing *just is* for it to be connected to feelings of amusement. As we’ll see, a big part of this debate concerns whether the values associated with emotions can be adequately characterized in non-emotion terms: is fear about *danger* or is it best understood as tracking the *fearsome*? Similarly, is shame about a *failure to live up to one’s ideals* or is it about the *shameful*? Moreover, given that sentimentalism is a highly controversial philosophical view, we will explore (in this chapter and the next two) the role that emotions might play if they are not the foundation for value and morality.

Agency: Are emotions the basis of responsibility? The discussion of Chapter 7 continues the work of the previous chapter by examining the role that the reactive attitudes—anger, pride, gratitude, etc.—play in our understanding of both responsibility and what it is to be an agent. As part of this discussion, we will also look to philosophical and empirical work on psychopaths. In the context of agency and responsibility, psychopaths are interesting because they appear to lack the ability to feel reactive attitudes—and this raises questions about whether it is appropriate to regard them as agents or hold them responsible for the violence they do.

Virtue: Do emotions make us better people? The final substantive chapter looks at the role of emotion in moral development, exploring in particular how this shapes our understanding of what it is to be a morally and epistemically virtuous person. As suggested by our earlier observations about compassion and disgust, a central issue in these debates concerns the (largely empirical) question of what, if anything, we can do to shape our emotions for the better. But the idea that emotions can—and so should—be cultivated raises difficult philosophical questions about our orientation to others. For instance, some feminist philosophers argue that calls to silence or reform negative emotions like anger are morally objectionable: why should an African-American seek to restrain or mitigate the anger she rightly feels in the face of the slurs and aggressions directed her way?

As you can see, there's a rich and complicated set of issues to explore. So let's get started!

Further reading

Additional introductions to the philosophy of emotion can be found in Deonna & Teroni 2012: Chapter 1, Prinz 2004: Chapter 1, and Scarantino & de Sousa 2018. For an overview of the study of emotion from other disciplines, see Fox 2008 (psychology), Beatty 2012 (anthropology), and Hogan 2010 (literature).

Notes

1 Here and throughout the book, I will use small caps to indicate when I'm referring to a concept rather than a property or a word—the need for this will become clearer as we progress.

2 Notice: this use of “intentional” and “intentionality” does not mean that the phenomena have a connection to motivation or are things we deliberately brought about.

3 Although the content of emotion is typically understood in terms of the emotion's material and formal objects, some philosophers resist this idea (e.g., Deonna & Teroni 2012). More on this in Section 2.4.

4 As will become apparent in the chapters that follow, part of what's at issue in debates about the intentionality of emotion is how to map emotions to values. For instance, is the evaluative content of fear to be associated with what's *dangerous* or what's *fearsome*? Is disgust an assessment of *contamination* or *disgustingness*? Is pride an assessment of one's *success* or what's *pride-worthy*? To preview, one reason this matters is that it's thought to be important for determining whether values are things we can characterize independently of the associated emotion or rather things that are inseparable from the emotion—does fear map to the dangerous or the fearsome; does disgust map to what's contaminated or what's disgusting? More on this in Chapter 6.

DOI: 10.4324/9780429316678-2