

Kristján Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 225 pages. ISBN: 9780198809678. Hardback: £45.00.

How Aristotelian does a contemporary Aristotelian account of emotions need to be? The very final words of *Virtuous Emotions* synthesize Kristján Kristjánsson's advocated route:

My advice to practically minded emotion theorists—especially those who, like me, approach the topic from the joint perspectives of moral philosophy and moral education—is simply this. Do read Aristotle first. It helps. But, equally, do not hesitate to depart from him where needed—and do not skip reading the contemporary psychological literature. It helps also (p. 201).

Honouring a career-long commitment to interdisciplinarity which has guided a prolific publication history on character, virtue, and emotion, Kristjánsson leads by example in this book. Although he is clearly a philosopher, firmly pro-Aristotelian and devotes a large proportion of the book to look at the original source, Kristjánsson is happy to question or even downright abandon Aristotelian tradition if he has to –and to push the boundaries of philosophical thought on emotions. As a result, *Virtuous Emotions* has something to offer to emotion theorists across a range of disciplines, to Aristotelian scholars, and to educators.

The book can be divided in three parts. The first part (chapters 1–2) mostly discusses virtue ethics and theory of emotion, with the aim to put in context Kristjánsson's stance. The second and central part (chapters 3–8) consists in self-standing chapters about six individual emotions: gratitude, pity, shame, jealousy, grief, and awe. Finally, the third and last part (chapters 9–10) focuses on character education and wraps up the central ideas of the book –including a useful table summarising the core ideas in the second part (p. 186).

In chapter 1, Kristjánsson defines his interpretation of Aristotelian emotions. Virtuous emotions are those emotions which are constitutive of virtue, understood in the traditional Aristotelian sense of malleable character traits which are conducive to *eudaimonia*. That standing of virtue emotions connects them directly to moral value, which is the focus of chapter 2. There, Kristjánsson argues that Aristotle's theory of emotion is a form of soft rationalism: "emotions are felt in a virtuous way when they are *infused with reason*, not in the way of being *policed by reason*" (p.34, emphases in original). That allows Kristjánsson to adopt a middle way between an anti-emotion reading of Kant – where all emotions hinder reason-, and extreme formulations of

Humean sentimentalism – where moral judgements do not differ at all from emotional experience.

The core chapters of the book (3–8) partly echo Kristjánsson's previous work on the emotions they address (see 2001 on pride; 2014a on pity; 2014b on shame; 2015 on gratitude; 2017 on awe). Hence, instead of reproducing the arguments for each individual emotion, it is more valuable to look here at the taxonomy of emotions which results from Kristjánsson's analysis.

Each of these chapters offers a discussion on the emotion in question which engages, at different length, with philosophical perspectives on it, psychological theory, empirical evidence and Aristotelian scholarship – what Aristotle said, different interpretations of what Aristotle said, and how both the original and secondary sources seat with social and natural sciences' discourses and evidence on emotions. The result is a *sui generis* classification of emotions in function of their justification, in two senses: desert versus non-desert based emotions; and intrinsic versus instrumentally virtuous emotions.

For Kristjánsson, gratitude, grief and jealousy are virtuous emotions because they correctly identify what the object of the emotion deserves. A virtuous person is to be grateful, to grieve or to be jealous of the people who deserve so. Regarding non-desert based emotions, shame is justified by its self-corrective and self-deterrent component. Awe is justified by its ability to enable the perception of transpersonal ideals – “a truly great ideal that is mystifying or even ineffable in transcending ordinary human experiences” (p. 149) – which in itself is a self-reflective activity characteristic of the virtuous person.

These five emotions – gratitude, grief, jealousy, shame and awe- have intrinsic value, that is, are virtuous in themselves, whereas the value of the last emotion, pity, is instrumental – its value lies in its ability to conduce to virtue.

Moving on, in chapter 9 Kristjánsson reviews seven discourses on emotional education, and explains how these make use of seven educational strategies. The conclusion is that emotional educators are too often ignoring what other people in the field are doing (p. 181). The final words in chapter 10 are a commented summary of Kristjánsson's work throughout the book, with some useful observations that make better sense looking back at the book as a whole.

The nature of the book, with mostly self-standing chapters, would usually call for a commentary that focuses on a couple of specific arguments. For example, it would be interesting to engage with Kristjánsson's remarks on an individual emotion like awe – which has only recently become an emergent topic in analytic philosophy. However, what I think is most interesting about *Virtuous Emotions* is its format and methodology.

Virtuous Emotions is, first and foremost, a pedagogic work. In a rather Aristotelian fashion, Kristjánsson is more often than not focused on extracting

the teachings that can be learnt from the dialectic between theories on emotions than to fight his own theoretical corner. This is patently evident in the way that he concludes each of the emotion chapters in the second part of the book. At the end of each chapter, Kristjánsson usefully summarises his arguments by directly answering two questions. The first one is 'what does this analysis add to an Aristotelian account of [x emotion]?'. The second, 'what does this analysis add to contemporary analysis of [x emotion]?'. Chapter 9 is another good display of this tendency. Contrary to what one would expect from an Aristotelian philosopher, Kristjánsson does not spend much time defending the Aristotelian approach to character education. Instead, he focuses on describing it with the same standing of six non-Aristotelian approaches, offering a meta-analysis of how they all stand with respect to each other.

This methodology results in a book which has immense value as a learning tool – as a manual or a textbook. This observation should not be taken as a back-handed compliment. Philosophy, and very specially Ancient Philosophy, is in dire need to reach out of its own boundaries, and Kristjánsson does that brilliantly. For example, *Virtuous Emotions* can be used in a course on Aristotle and emotions in order to teach how to make Aristotelian theory current. It can also be used as an introduction to Aristotle for educators in other disciplines: a psychologist or an anthropologist will have at their disposal a comparison of their own approaches with a virtue ethical one. Also, Kristjánsson's work has many things to teach to non-Aristotelian philosophers of emotion, who may feel alienated by works by Aristotelian scholars where the original source is not always compared to current debates. Finally, it is a useful tool to learn about character education in general and its theoretical underpinnings for educators in general.

Admittedly, Kristjánsson's approach may raise complaints from different fronts, but I think *Virtuous Emotions* stands its ground against such objections. Firstly, non-Aristotelian theorists of emotion might complain that the argument for soft rationalism in chapter 2 is too short to definitely establish Kristjánsson's framework as the best for character education. But after all, none of these theories specifically focus on character education as much as Aristotle did, so the length of the discussion is justified. Secondly, Aristotelian scholars might complain that in some cases, Kristjánsson's interpretation of Aristotle is up for debate. However, in each chapter of the second part Kristjánsson discusses a range of Aristotelian views, so he cannot be accused to have turned his back to the Aristotelian debate. These complaints, in my opinion, would miss the pedagogical aim of the book and fail to acknowledge Kristjánsson's efforts in this regard.

A complaint that I believe would stand is one regarding the connection between the chapters. In principle, there is nothing wrong with the current format of self-standing chapters, but it feels like chapter 9 misses the opportunity to bring Kristjánsson's claims into the discussion of character education. There is barely any mention to gratitude, grief, jealousy, shame, awe or pity there. It would have been good to read in more detail how the six emotions which take up most of the book can be educated, and how each of the approaches in chapter 9 would have faced that challenge. In any case, this is not a book on character education but on virtuous emotions. Hence, the complaint is not about the book in general but about the missed opportunity, and the suitability of finishing with character education without looking at the previous chapters (for Kristjánsson's work on character education, see 2015b).

All in all, *Virtuous Emotions* does live up to its aim of being a book for the "practically minded" philosopher of emotion. We do have a good number of works on Aristotelian philosophy. However, the discipline needs more works that, like Kristjánsson's, does not have as a main aim discussing Aristotle's theory, but following Aristotle's method: to create a work that is a tool for learning, rather than the displaying of watertight arguments which often is the chief objective for the analytic philosopher.

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