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### **Abstract**

We start this overview by discussing the place of emotions within the broader affective domain – how different are emotions from moods, sensations and affective dispositions? Next, we examine the way emotions relate to their objects, emphasizing in the process their intimate relations to values. We move from this inquiry into the nature of emotion to an inquiry into their epistemology. Do they provide reasons for evaluative judgements and, more generally, do they contribute to our knowledge of values? We then address the question of the social dimension of emotions, explaining

how the traditional nature vs. nurture contrast applies to the emotions. We finish by exploring the relations between emotions, motivation and action, concluding this overview with a more specific focus on how these relations bear on some central ethical issues.

Imagine that you overhear someone making fun of a close friend of yours. You take offense. Anger flares up. Physiological changes, involving a variety of processes controlled by the autonomic nervous system, are triggered. Your heart pounds and you hold your breath. Your brows narrow as you stare at the author of the joke, your attention fixed upon him. Your body feels tense and you clench your fists. Thoughts cross your mind in quick succession. What a mean thing to suggest about your friend, you think. Should you walk away, be rude, or do something more extreme such as hitting the offender?

It is clear that emotions such as anger raise fascinating philosophical issues. In this overview, we concentrate on the following ones. The first section considers the question of how emotions such as the episode of anger described above may differ from other affective phenomena using three central distinctions in the philosophy of mind: those between mental dispositions and mental episodes, between experiences and other mental states, and between intentional and nonintentional states. In the second section, we turn to the question of the nature of emotions themselves. The general issue here concerns the sense in which emotions are evaluations and how best to characterize this aspect of them in psychological terms. For instance, should we think of them as judgements, perceptions or something else? Does getting angry in the way suggested consist in judging that the joke was offensive or perhaps in perceiving the offensiveness of the joke? The third section is concerned with the epistemological role of emotions in relation to evaluative judgements. For instance, does your anger provide reasons for thinking that the joke was offensive? We then consider, in the fourth section, various ways in which we can apply the nature vs. nurture contrast to emotions. To stay with our example, does culture play a role in the way you get angry or are angry, and if so, what is it? The relation between emotions and motivation is the topic of the fifth section. What is the relation between your anger and your desire to be rude or even to hit the offender? This then leads us to the sixth and final section, in which we theorize about the variety of roles emotions play in ethics and, more specifically, whether we can appeal to them to elucidate moral motivation and moral judgement. Can we think of your angry reaction towards the joke as having moral significance?

## EMOTION AND THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

When we inquire into the nature of emotions, one of the first issues concerns how similar they are to neighbouring phenomena such as moods, sentiments, passions, desires, feelings and the like. Confronted with similar taxonomical issues in other areas of the mental, philosophers have equipped themselves with notions and distinctions that allow making some progress with respect to this issue. These are: the distinction between what takes place or happens (mental episodes) and more stable conditions (mental dispositions); the distinction between states with a phenomenal or qualitative character (experiences) and those with no such character; the distinction between states that are directed at things beyond themselves (what philosophers call intentional states) and those that are not.

The distinction between episodes and dispositions helps demarcate two sorts of affective phenomena. On the one hand, there are affective phenomena that have an onset, wax, wane, and then disappear after what is often a short period of time. On the other hand, there are stable and relatively long-lasting states that characterize the manner in which people tend to engage affectively with the world.<sup>1,2</sup> For example, if you say “Sam is angry with his father”, you may be understood either as saying that Sam is currently undergoing an episode of anger, or as saying that he has a disposition to get angry with his father, although he is presently happily thinking about his mother or even asleep. Having the disposition to get angry at one’s father in this way implies that one is likely to enter in a variety of episodes of anger (these are the manifestations of the disposition) in circumstances involving the parent in question (these are its triggering conditions). Most philosophers, but not all<sup>3,4</sup>, use the term “emotion” to refer to episodes – a practice that might not follow ordinary usage – and use the technical term “emotional disposition” to refer to more or less stable manners to engage affectively with the world. “Cares”, “concerns”, “attachments”, “sentiments” and “personality or character traits” are ordinary terms that are sometimes used to characterize subsets of these dispositions.

This distinction between episodes and dispositions, which is in itself not controversial, raises a number of interesting philosophical issues. First, should we draw further distinctions among the affective dispositions and, if so, what are the relevant criteria?<sup>5</sup> Although arachnophobia and love for one’s country both count as affective dispositions, for example, they may invite different analyses. Second, while it is generally thought that many if not all affective episodes are manifestations of affective dispositions – one’s present anger at one’s uncle’s seemingly inconsiderate behaviour is a manifestation of one’s lack of patience for his selfishness – this leaves

the question of explanatory priority completely open. Do emotional dispositions really have a psychological reality over and above that of these episodes? Or should we try to explain them in terms of emotional episodes? Should we on the contrary explain the episodes in terms of emotional dispositions, i.e. do episodes constitutively depend on the dispositions they manifest? Alternatively, there may be reasons to refrain from any such priority claim so as to preserve the possibility of there being interesting (explanatory, epistemic or otherwise) relations between them.<sup>6</sup>

The second distinction can also be put to use. Emotions are paradigmatic states with qualitative or phenomenal character. There is something it is like to have them: they are experiences.<sup>7-9</sup> Observe that they differ from affective dispositions in this respect too – lack of patience for one’s uncle’s selfishness does not feel like anything independently of the emotions it may give rise to – as well as from other mental episodes – such as judgements, perhaps, since it is at least not obvious that it feels like anything to judge that two and two make four.<sup>10,11</sup> This is of course not to say that emotions are the only affective experiences, since, as we shall see, moods qualify too.

Scrutiny of the phenomenal dimension of the emotions raises some of the most traditional and central questions in the field. First, are all emotions conscious phenomena? One plausible claim is that we need not be conscious of an emotion in the sense of being aware of it in order to undergo it. One need not realize one is afraid to be afraid, as one’s attention in fear is typically directed toward what one is afraid of. Second, should we leave room for a more dramatic claim, i.e. that we can undergo emotions without feeling anything?<sup>10,12</sup> While the former claim is accepted by a vast majority of philosophers,<sup>12,13</sup> the latter has not proven as popular. In psychology, however, some have found it helpful to distinguish feeling an emotion and having it, since there may be behavioural or neurophysiological evidence of an emotion’s occurrence without any evidence that the subject is feeling it.<sup>14,15</sup> Now, whether or not having an emotion is feeling, the nature of emotional phenomenology raises fascinating questions such as the following. Is this phenomenology sufficiently rich so as to support a significant proportion of the distinctions amongst types of emotions we find in ordinary language? Many philosophers and psychologists have thought not<sup>16,17</sup>, arguing that one and the same phenomenology is, taken on its own, compatible with emotions we ordinarily consider to be very different. Furthermore, while many emotions obviously involve experiencing alterations of one’s bodily condition along various dimensions (muscular, physiological, endocrinal, etc.), can the phenomenology of all emotions be captured in bodily terms?<sup>3,13</sup> Finally, is it a characteristic trait of undergoing emotions that it feels either good or bad to undergo them, i.e. that they have either a positive or a negative hedonic tone? This last question is intimately related to the project of explaining what is called the *valence* of emotions.<sup>18,19</sup>

The third distinction, between states that are directed at something (states that have intentionality) and states that are not (states that have no intentionality), can also be used to draw further boundaries within the affective realm. Observe that there seems to be a striking contrast between paradigmatic bodily sensations on the one hand and emotional experiences on the other.<sup>8,20,21</sup> The former, like tickles or a shiver down the spine, are not directed at anything or at least not anything outside the body. This is certainly not the case of one's run of the mill emotions, such as fear, anger, admiration and amusement, which rarely if ever target one's own bodily condition(s) but are rather about worldly objects, events and states of affairs. One is angry at one's father, admires a mountain view, is amused by the joke, regrets that Jeanne could not come to the party, and so on. Still, while it is clear that emotions are about worldly objects, it is unclear whether this aspect of their intentionality is or is not purely *derivative* from the thoughts that accompany these emotions. Why not say that my fear of the exam just consists in a thought being directed at the upcoming exam and accompanied by sensations typical of fear but which have in themselves no intentionality?<sup>29-31</sup> Or should we say that it is a nonintentional displeasure arising out of the realisation that one's desire for not being examined in the near future is frustrated?<sup>32</sup> However one wants to answer these questions, we shall see in the next section that there is another aspect of emotional intentionality that may be *original* (i.e. nonderivative) to them.

Before we turn to that, this is the place to observe that the fact that emotions are directed outside the body explains why philosophers have been on the whole reluctant to assimilate them to assortments of bodily sensations, a claim which is rightly or wrongly associated with William James.<sup>22,23</sup> If this contrast at the level of intentionality distinguishes emotions from sensations, it also distinguishes them from moods. Moods, it is often claimed,<sup>24</sup> are episodic in nature and have a phenomenal character. They may have the same duration as emotions (although this is not typical of them), but contrary to emotions they are not intentionally directed towards anything. It certainly feels like something to be grumpy, but it is not clear that one can be grumpy about or at something.

Amongst the lively debates surrounding these issues, the following should be singled out. Is there really a categorical difference between emotions and moods at the level of their respective intentionality, or is it rather a mere difference in degree?<sup>25-27</sup> Should we not say for example that grumpiness is in fact a sort of irritation directed at the world at large and thus that moods have just less specific objects than emotions?<sup>3</sup> And what should we say of the following very common sort of case: while angry at your boss, you are made to remember a very funny joke. We may surmise that part of the way it feels to be angry endures while you remember the joke. Still, should we say that you are angry at your boss and amused by the joke, or that you are in an irritated mood that will be redirected to your boss as soon as your attention is drawn away from the joke?<sup>24,28</sup>

## EMOTIONS AND EVALUATIONS

Emotions are about something; they are intentional states. This may, as we suggested, help distinguish emotions from moods and sensations, but it is certainly not distinctive of them. You could *imagine* your boss or *believe* that your boss asked you to stay after hours. So is there something distinctive and original to the intentionality of emotions? There are some substantive reasons to think so. Emotions seem after all to be some sorts of *positive* or *negative* attitudes towards the world. Can we say more?

It looks as if the distinct types of emotions are distinct types of positive or negative evaluations of what they are about.<sup>33</sup> It makes a lot of sense to think of, say, anger as a way of evaluating an object as offensive or obstructive, as it makes sense to think of fear as an evaluation of an object as dangerous, of amusement as an evaluation of an object as funny, and of shame as an evaluation of an object as degraded.<sup>34,35</sup> This readily explains many aspects of the way we consider emotions in everyday life. If emotions are evaluations, we understand why we sometimes criticize (“you shouldn’t be afraid”) or recommend (“you should show some compassion”) emotions. The idea, then, is that a type of emotion can be about a great variety of objects (you can fear the snake, the exam, your uncle, death, etc.), but that it always evaluates it in the same way (as a threatening object). This would constitute the distinctive and original intentional aspect of emotions – in philosophical jargon, the evaluative property in light of which the particular object is apprehended is called the *formal object* of the emotion.<sup>36</sup>

According to some classical ways of understanding why emotions qualify as evaluations, the idea that this constitutes an original aspect of their intentionality appears difficult to maintain, however. Consider for instance the very simple suggestion, apparently held by the Stoics, that *emotions are evaluative judgements* – to be angry at your boss is to judge that he is offensive or obstructive, to be ashamed of yourself is to think that you are degraded.<sup>37,38</sup> Emotions would relate to the world in a way with which we are familiar from our ordinary judgements, and there would accordingly be no original aspect to their intentionality. Be that as it may, the judgement approach has a number of potential problems. First, one may wonder whether undergoing an emotion requires that the subject make the relevant evaluative judgement. Sometimes we feel emotions despite not endorsing the sort of evaluation they contain, as is the case when we react in a way we know is inappropriate. A spider phobic, for example, does not need to judge the spider to be dangerous to fear it.<sup>39,40</sup> One can be tempted, therefore, to adjust one’s way of conceiving of the emotions by claiming that emotions, as opposed to judgements, do not involve the subject’s endorsement of the relevant evaluation.

Perhaps *thinking* of the object in the relevant evaluative terms is enough.<sup>35,41</sup> To be angry at your boss is nothing more than thinking of him as offensive. The temptation should be resisted, however. For, second, understanding the emotions in terms of judgements or thoughts simply misses the fact that emotions are specific types of experiences. To judge that someone is offensive, if it feels like anything, need not feel anything like experiencing an episode of anger. This is perhaps even clearer in the case of a mere thought to the same effect in which the subject does not even endorse the evaluation.<sup>8,42</sup> Third and relatedly, evaluative judgements and thoughts are not obviously available to at least some non-human animals to which we surely want to ascribe emotions.<sup>43,44</sup>

It is with these worries in mind that one may try to understand the distinctive evaluative aspect of emotions along different lines. We should not appeal to judgement or thought, but rather to *perception*, perhaps the paradigmatic type of mental states in relation to which we speak of experience. The idea is that, in the same way as an object may visually strike you as being scarlet, it may emotionally strike you as being offensive or dangerous, and that the underlying similarities run sufficiently deep so as to warrant talk of emotion in terms of perception. This analogy has been made forcefully by Ronald de Sousa<sup>28</sup> and has been turned into a variety of perceptual approaches to the emotions.<sup>13,45-52</sup> This would not only be faithful to the phenomenal dimension of emotions, it would in addition account appealingly for the other problems faced by the more intellectual takes on evaluation discussed previously. In particular, one may now think of phobias on the model of some illusions we are familiar with in the realm of perception. In the same way as experiencing a stick half-immersed in water as bent does not force one to judge that the stick is bent, experiencing one's boss as offensive need not lead one to judge that she is offensive.<sup>39,40</sup> In both cases, one can know better. Moreover, representing danger or offensiveness perceptually may be supported by cognitive capacities of the kind that animals possess.

While the perceptual model is very appealing, it faces some important challenges.<sup>53-55</sup> Observe, first, that although perceptual experiences have, like emotions, a salient phenomenology, it is not obviously of the right sort to help shed light on emotional experiences. In experiencing an emotion, it feels like one is *reacting to* or *taking a stance towards* what is represented. This seems to differ significantly from the kind of purely *receptive* phenomenology characteristic of, say, ordinary auditory or visual perception. Honouring one of the central promises made by the perceptual model will then be harder than might first appear. Second, in perception, properties are thought to be causally responsible for the perceptual experiences. But what exactly are the properties that emotions allegedly perceive, and can they play the relevant causal role? If they are evaluative properties, as commonly conceived within the models under discussion, this raises the following worries. The idea seems to presuppose a controversial form of realism about evaluative properties,

i.e. the claim that these properties are 'out there' and apt to cause psychological responses. In addition, it seems to presuppose a view of what perception consists in that is liberal enough to welcome the claim that evaluative properties can be perceived. Third, observe that many of our emotions are elicited by thoughts about events or objects that are spatially and temporally quite distant from us. The fact that accounting for these cases in perceptual terms is not straightforward reveals an important disanalogy between emotions and perceptions. While the former depend on other mental states<sup>64</sup> so as to have a subject matter, the specificity of the latter resides precisely in their being independent on this count. One cannot be angry at one's boss without this presupposing that one represents her in another way (through imagination, memory, belief, perception, etc.). But no additional mental state needs to play this role in order to visually represent one's boss.

These challenges may very well be met by the perceptual model – perhaps the above remarks are premised on too conservative a view of perception, for instance. According to one such less conservative view, perception consists at bottom in systematic causal covariations selected by evolution between environmental conditions and mental responses. The way in which Jesse Prinz has applied this view of perception to the emotions has attracted a lot of attention.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, the issues raised provide the incentive to look for other theoretical options. Two very general strategies suggest themselves. One may first look for alternative ways of understanding the sort of evaluation that the emotions consist in or incorporate. Instead of trying to assimilate them to more familiar types of mental states like judgements, thoughts or perceptions, it may be insisted that emotions are *sui generis* types of evaluation: perhaps, as has been recently claimed, distinct types of attitudes.<sup>53,56</sup> If so, we should definitively try to say more about what they are, since we seem otherwise to be back at our starting point. Second, one may think that the problems faced by the approaches discussed in the foregoing all stem from the idea that emotions are evaluations, and should for that reason lead us to reconsider it. This may provide the incentive to return to more traditional approaches that emphasize the feeling dimension of emotions.<sup>31,32,57</sup> Still, capturing the distinctive sort of evaluative intentionality involved in emotions, although it remains disputed that there is one, is at the centre of contemporary philosophical debates regarding the nature of emotion<sup>58</sup>.

## **EPISTEMOLOGY AND UNDERSTANDING**

So far, we have been concerned with the nature of emotions ("What are they?"). We shall turn our attention to epistemological issues surrounding them ("How do they contribute to knowledge?"). We have seen in the previous section that we should not account for the nature of emotions by



identifying them with evaluative judgements. That being said, emotions clearly often *give rise to* evaluative judgements – your enjoyment of the movie may lead you to judge that it was good, and your anger at your boss may lead you to think of her as a disrespectful person. This is not in dispute. What is much disputed is whether emotions can do more than just causally bring about these judgements. We may wonder, first, whether emotions play a role in our *understanding* of the evaluative aspect of these judgements, i.e. in our mastery of the evaluative concepts they contain. Second, we may wonder whether they can serve as *reasons* or *evidence* or *justification* for such judgements. If the answer to any of these questions is positive, this would mean that emotions play a significant role in our capacity to gain evaluative knowledge. Exploring whether this is the case allows revisiting some of the approaches to the nature of emotions we have presented above.

The possibility of asking any of the above questions about the relations between emotions and evaluative judgements does not even arise if one identifies the former with the latter. If emotions themselves already require that one deploys the relevant evaluative concepts, then one is left wondering how these have been acquired and, more generally, what sort of understanding the subject has of them and under which circumstances they are justified. This allows us to acknowledge two of the great selling points of the idea that emotions are perceptions of evaluative properties.

First, regarding the *meaning or understanding* of evaluative concepts, the perceptual model is in a position to draw an illuminating parallel. In the same way as a person born blind will lack some central ingredient of what it means for something to be rightly described as being of this or that colour, a person devoid of any emotional repertoire will lack some central ingredient of what it means for something to be described as of this or that value. Perhaps this truth is even more blatant in the case of emotions: what concept of the amusing or the admirable could be had by someone incapable of feeling any kind of amusement or admiration?<sup>53,59</sup>

Second, regarding the question of the potential *justificatory role* that emotions have vis-à-vis the relevant evaluative judgements, the perceptual analogy is also very promising.<sup>45,50,60</sup> When a perceptual state presents an object as having a certain property, this seems to constitute a reason for judging that this object has that property, perhaps even to justify that judgement provided no evidence to the contrary is forthcoming. The same may be said of emotions: when an emotion presents an object as having a certain evaluative property, this seems equally to constitute a reason for judging that this object has that property, perhaps even to justify that evaluative judgement provided there is no evidence to the contrary (e.g. one is not on drugs, not biased, not in a completely foreign social environment or, more generally, not affectively imbalanced, etc.). If this is along the right track, the perceptual model can pride itself in having found a plausible source for both our understanding of evaluative concepts and our knowledge about them.

While this is indeed quite plausible, some questions must still be answered. It is after all a truism that emotions can lead us astray and that the judgements they prompt us to make in the heat of the moment are often of a dubious epistemic standing.<sup>55,61,62</sup> Emotions are perhaps not to be trusted, and their reliability cannot be taken for granted in the way the reliability of perception can be. Observe how this fact is mirrored in the sorts of questions we readily ask about people's emotions as opposed to people's perceptual experiences.<sup>63</sup> If someone refers to Marie having seen the pony car in the parking lot as an explanation of why Marie has judged that the pony car was parked there, this explanation is satisfactory in the sense that we think of such perceptual states not only as reasons for such kinds of judgements, but also as natural end points in the search for epistemic explanations. By contrast, suppose that you are asked why you judged a person's action to be unfair and that you respond by mentioning your indignation at the action. Citing this emotion may go some way towards providing a reason for the judgement, but it certainly cannot be seen as a natural end point in the search for epistemic explanations. For it would be natural to continue questioning the person: "Yes, but why such indignation?". We would then expect the person to make reference to some features of the situation in the light of which the unfairness is made manifest or at least intelligible.<sup>53</sup> On this basis, one may be led to think that the epistemological role of emotions differs from that of perceptions. Emotions constitute reasons for evaluative judgements, but they also respond to reasons and are themselves capable of being justified or unjustified. Perceptions, however, constitute reasons, but do not in addition respond to reasons and are not themselves capable of being justified or unjustified in this way.

The fact that emotions respond to reasons appears to be intimately related to the fact, emphasized in the previous section, that they fundamentally depend on other mental states.<sup>65</sup> Recall that what the emotions are about is always accessed through other mental states (perceptions, beliefs, memories, etc.). We may indeed think that the sorts of reasons to which emotions are responsive are at least partly provided by the content of the mental states on which they depend. The above question, "Why such indignation?", is at least partly answered by mentioning, say, that one has seen the person being subject to a humiliating physical treatment. In addition, observe that a further part of the answer is provided by another source of what looks like reasons for emotions and the judgements they give rise to, namely the variety of emotional dispositions (cares, concerns, sentiments, character traits, etc.) of which emotions are manifestations as well as conative states such as desires and wishes.<sup>63</sup> An episode of indignation may thus be explained by one's care for social justice. More generally, our emotional responses are very commonly made intelligible in the light of the particular sentiments, concerns or attachments that relate us to people, institutions or other objects.

Amongst the issues raised by the foregoing observations about the epistemological role of emotions, the following are especially pressing. First, what is the exact role played by emotional dispositions (cares, concerns, sentiments, etc.) or conative states (desires, wishes) with respect to emotions? Do they merely explain causally why emotions occur, or do they provide distinctive justifying reasons for them? Could my enmity for my boss justify my being angry at what she now tells me? The issue is made especially difficult as the answer seems to depend on one's conception of the nature of the evaluative properties to which emotions allegedly respond.<sup>53</sup> Suppose that the offensive nature of one's boss' remark entirely depends on one's enmity for her or more generally on one's wish for not being the target of such remarks. If so, then of course mention of the disposition or the wish will go quite a long way towards justifying the episode of anger they elicit. This is because they will partly *constitute* the remark's offensiveness. By contrast, if the evaluative properties at stake are more independent from emotional dispositions and conative states, as some realists would have it, then we should carefully distinguish their causal contribution to the occurrence of emotions from their potential contribution to their justification. Second, if evaluative properties prove to be relatively independent from emotional dispositions and the like, then important issues arise as to whether and to what extent these psychological conditions distort one's appreciation of the evaluative landscape.<sup>63</sup> If emotions are to be a sort of mechanism for detecting evaluative properties, it better be the case that they reach a level of reliability compatible with such a status. Third, if as we have suggested emotions are themselves capable of being justified or unjustified, can they still play a justificatory role vis-à-vis the evaluative judgements they elicit? Or are the reasons that justify these emotions also and uniquely responsible for the justification of these evaluative judgements?

Two very different pictures suggest themselves here.<sup>53</sup> According to one of them, emotions are superfluous routes to judgements because these judgements may have the same epistemic credentials independently of emotions. If there are reasons to judge that one's boss' remark is offensive, these reasons support the relevant judgement irrespective of whether they in addition elicit an emotional reaction.<sup>61</sup> According to the other picture, emotions play a non-eliminable role in transmitting reasons to evaluative judgements. This role may consist, first, in the fact that emotions lock attention to features of the environment one would have missed but for their occurrence,<sup>28,65</sup> and maintain attentional focus on them in such a way that one is in a good epistemic position to make the relevant evaluative judgements. The second sense in which emotions constitute a non-eliminable way of transmitting reasons to judgements of value is that of contributing essentially to one's understanding of the evaluative dimension of these judgements, an idea we have already mentioned in connection with the acquisition of evaluative concepts. If this is the case, it might well be that emotions are indispensable to acquire knowledge of value.

## NATURE VS. NURTURE

We have started this overview trying to distinguish emotions from other inhabitants of the affective realm. We have observed that we may distinguish different types of emotions according to the type of evaluation they respectively make. We shall now see that there are broader structural distinctions to be drawn within the emotional domain. The central question in this area regards the existence of a division between emotions that are relatively impervious to contextual influences and emotions that are very much permeable to such influences.

One way of addressing this question is through the very intuitive distinction between emotions that look relatively simple or basic (fear, anger and joy) and emotions that look more complex (regret, pride, nostalgia). While this is a very ancient distinction, psychologists nowadays pursue this insight by trying to find out which emotions have distinctive biological signatures, be they discoverable through the relevant facial expressions, brain circuits, evolutionary function, motivational role or patterns of physiological activation.<sup>66-68</sup> The viability of this project can be put into question.<sup>69</sup> However, those who find it convincing that some parts of the emotional domain are in this sense primary have interesting resources at their disposal to articulate the relations between the emotionally basic and the emotionally more complex.

While there are different ways to go about articulating these relations, the following one, nicely developed in Jesse Prinz,<sup>13,70</sup> proves especially attractive. Drawing from the distinctions we made in the foregoing between the kind of evaluation that an emotion type involves and the variety of objects that it can take, we can be led to think that some types of complex emotions result from a particular inflection of a more basic type of emotions. Indignation is a type of anger: both indignation and anger evaluate in terms of offensiveness, but the former focuses on one type of offensive objects, i.e. immoral actions of others. Likewise, *Schadenfreude* and the Japanese emotion *ijirashii* are types of joy that are exclusively focused on two subsets of what may elicit joy: the misfortunes and the accomplishments of others, respectively. If so, then cultural influences on emotions should be understood as harnessing our basic emotional repertoire and channelling it in directions that are considered of special import within the relevant culture. Such an approach is in the interesting position to account for important cultural variations in the emotions (including significant differences regarding how prevalent an emotion is), while preserving intact the idea that human emotional lives build on a set of universally shared emotional capacities.

This may constitute too superficial a reaction to the pervasiveness of the social forces exerted on the emotions, however. Consider for instance the great variety of ways in which emotions find

expression in different social, cultural and historical contexts. Contrast how pride is expressed in a competitive, achievement-oriented society with the way it was stigmatized and hence repressed in the medieval Christian world. Or think of the momentous differences in the ways grief is expressed in Iran and in Switzerland. How emotions get expressed in different settings, it might be thought, contributes essentially to the very identity of the emotions one feels. From these observations, it is perhaps a small step to the claim that, in shaping the way emotions are expressed, a subject or the group to which she belongs do not merely channel the natural manifestations of biologically determined responses in specific directions. They more fundamentally contribute to fixing the very nature of the emotions. Grist is brought to the same mill when we recognize the importance of the communicative function of emotional display,<sup>71,72</sup> and how it can be more or less consciously bent to serve a variety of personal or communal ends.<sup>66</sup> Emotions would thus be more profitably understood in light of the ends we pursue in shaping them than as given biological building blocks.

These thoughts fit naturally within a tradition according to which emotions, considered at whatever level we care to look at (brain, physiology, phenomenology), fail to have any distinctive profile.<sup>17,73,76</sup> If that is the case (i.e. if the responses underdetermine the specific type of emotion the subject may be experiencing) then it is up to the subject herself or perhaps even to members of her community to determine which it is. And, obviously, the response itself won't exert much pressure on the direction this determination process takes. According to this form of constructionism about emotions, it is up to the subject or members of her community to determine which emotion is taking place by interpreting a response largely on the basis of relevant and/or salient cultural norms as well as of contextual features of the situation in which the emotion takes place.<sup>75-77</sup> For example, the negative and high-arousal emotional response one has when witnessing someone courting one's partner may be constituted into an episode of righteous indignation in one cultural context, and into one of pathetic jealousy in another. Now, if this is true, observe that determining which emotions we feel is not a matter of being more attentive to what goes on within us, but rather a matter of subsuming whatever we feel under the relevant personal or communal norms.

Does the evidence force us to adopt such a far-reaching form of constructionism about the emotions? Or can the different ways in which our emotional life lends itself to social influences – in particular the social dimension of the emotions' triggers as well as that of their expressions – be addressed within a framework that acknowledges the universal and innate character of at least some of our emotions? The tension between these two poles structures much of the recent debates in the area<sup>78</sup>.

## **EMOTIONS AND ACTION**

It is often taken for granted that emotions move us to action. The term 'emotion', which comes from the Latin *ex*, which means out, and *movere*, which means to move, suggests that emotions tightly related to motivation. In any case, anger is often thought to come with aggressive behaviour, while fear is commonly related to specific responses such as flight. The nature of the connection between emotions and motivation is a central question in emotion research. There are many ways to conceive of the relation, but the most central from a philosophical point of view is in terms of the essential nature of emotions. Is there an essential relation between emotions and motivation, or at least between emotions such as anger and fear and motivation? If so, one could not undergo an emotion like anger without being motivated to aggressive behaviour. In fact, it might be tempting to hold the even stronger thesis that the very *concept* of emotion is one of a state that involves motivation. Putative cases of emotion lacking any motivational component would be ruled out by definition.

To address the question of the relation between emotion and motivation, one first has to reflect on the nature of the motivation at issue. It is generally agreed that emotions such as anger or fear facilitate action, in the sense that bodily changes prepare us for action and increase the probability of certain type of actions, such as revenge when we are angry, or flight when we are afraid. The hedonic tones of emotions are also plausibly taken to have a motivational effect. But the question is whether the motivations involved in emotion are specific behavioural dispositions that feed directly into the motor system, or whether they are states, such as desires, that only have an indirect influence on what we do.

According to the first approach, an emotion like anger or fear comes with rigid behavioural dispositions to perform a limited number of actions. In the case of anger, these are the kinds of behaviour we associate with aggression and revenge, such as menace, attack and fight, while in the case of fear, the pieces of behaviour standardly referred to are flight, freeze and fight.<sup>73,79-80</sup> These dispositions are taken to be triggered by a narrow range of stimuli, such as the sight of a competitor or a predator, and are thought to be characterised by rapid and automatic manifestations, which occur independently of thought and decision.<sup>66,79-81</sup>

The thesis that emotions involve behavioural dispositions is plausible in the case of most non-human emotions.<sup>82</sup> However, even if human beings occasionally manifest the same kind of behaviour as frightened squirrels and marmots, it is obvious that what human beings do when they experience anger or fear is much more varied. Anger might make you shout and hit the table with your fist, but it might also get you to talk with your lawyer. Panic might make you run out of a building on fire, but

it can also get you to call for help on your cell-phone. This is why many have thought that the relation between fear and action is an indirect one.

On this alternative approach, emotions are taken to involve states, such as motives or desires, which have an indirect influence on action. They influence the agent's decision process by setting specific goals.<sup>13,83,84</sup> Following Aristotle, anger has been taken to involve a desire for revenge (Ref 85, II, 2, 1378b)<sup>85</sup>. Fear, on the other hand, is often thought to involve the desire to avoid harm or loss. These desires inform the agent's decision process and result in action only on the basis of this decision process. Given your other goals, and given what is taken to be feasible, the desires in question might well have no effect on what you do. You might be angry at whoever stole your bicycle but since you fail to know who it is, no revenge follows. This is a plausible account of the motivational impact of emotions, but the question arises as to how to interpret it. Should we take it that emotions like anger or fear, or maybe all emotions, are essentially tied to desires? Or is the relation a weaker one?

A first family of cases that are difficult to square with this conception are emotions that involve so-called 'expressive actions'.<sup>86-88</sup> Consider Jane, who out of hatred gouges holes in the eyes of her rival on a photograph. It is plausible to assume that Jane's hatred involves a desire that sets the goal of harming that person. The problem is that the desire in question would fail to explain what Jane does, given the assumption that she does not hold that harming a photograph does real harm. According to Peter Goldie's plausible suggestion, expressive actions such as Jane's are explained by wishes, understood as conative states which involve imagining that one satisfies a desire.<sup>3</sup> What Jane desires is to scratch out her rival's eyes, but since that is out of question, she scratches out the eyes in the photograph imagining that by harming the photograph, she achieves her goal. Alternatively, it might be argued that Jane's action can be explained in terms of the misfiring of a primitive disposition to harm that is often present in hate. Given the visual similarity between the photograph and the real person, the primitive disposition to harm is likely to be triggered as much by the photograph of someone as by the real person.

Another family of problematic cases are emotions directed at fiction. We often feel anger or fear when reading a novel or watching a film. These emotions appear to have a tenuous link to motivation. For instance, as Kendall Walton observed, you might shriek and clutch your chair when you watch a film in which a green slime oozes over the earth, destroying everything on its path, but you don't run out of the theatre or call 911 for help.<sup>89</sup> According to some, such as Walton himself, such cases do not involve genuine emotions, but only 'quasi-emotions'. However, it might well be that such emotions are genuine ones even if they fail to involve the typical desires and evaluative

judgements found in real-life cases.<sup>82,90</sup> If this is correct, even an emotion like fear would not be essentially related to a motivation.

Similar difficulties arise from emotions that are directed at the past. You can surely be angry at an ancestor who lost the family estate by gambling, but even though such anger might involve the desire to get back at your ancestor as well as expressive action, it is far from clear that anger directed at the past needs to do so. Moreover, there are kinds of emotions that are less obviously connected to motivation, such as admiration, joy, relief, and awe. It would seem that you can admire a landscape without having any particular desire or wish regarding the landscape. So, even if emotions such as anger and fear appear standardly tied to desires and thus to action, it is not obvious that this is part of their essence. And more generally, it is far from clear that it is part of the essence of emotions in general that they involve motivation. Thus, it is unlikely that the ordinary concept of emotion is such as to exclude cases in which there is no motivation. Still, it has to be acknowledged that many emotions standardly come with both behavioural dispositions and specific desires. This is the main reason why emotions have been a central topic in ethics.

## **EMOTIONS AND ETHICS**

With only the slightest exaggeration, the philosophical community might be seen to be divided into two opposite camps. On the one side, we have the rationalists, who put their trust in the faculty of reason, and find fault with most, if not all, emotions. On the other side, we have the sentimentalists, who often combine a suspicion of the power of reason with various claims about the importance of emotions in our lives. Rationalists consider most emotions to be a threat to rationality, whether theoretical or practical. Episodes of anger, envy and fear have thus been accused of interfering with proper reasoning, of favouring irrational and imprudent behaviour, and of eliciting immoral actions (Ref 33, bk. viii).<sup>33</sup> Sentimentalists, however, hold that far from constituting an obstacle to rationality and morality, emotions are both crucial to the proper functioning of reason, and essential to pro-social and moral action. Following the work of Ronald de Sousa<sup>28</sup> and Antonio Damasio<sup>91</sup>, most contemporary emotion theorists have adopted the sentimentalist stance.<sup>92</sup>

The debate between rationalists and sentimentalists is far from settled. This is particularly striking in ethics, where the opposition between moral rationalism and moral sentimentalism continues to define the battleground. Moral rationalism, which is often traced back to Immanuel Kant<sup>93</sup>, can be characterised, very roughly, as the claim that moral judgements are grounded in reason. By contrast, moral sentimentalism not only denies that moral judgements are grounded in reason, it also claims that the ground of moral judgements lies in our sentiments. Thus, David Hume, the most prominent



moral sentimentalist, famously states that ‘morality [...] is more properly felt than judg’d of’ (Ref 94, book III, Part I, Section III) and explicitly argues that moral distinctions are not derived from reason.

To make progress in this debate, two questions need to be settled. The first concerns the nature of emotions. It is only if emotions are taken to be entirely non-intentional states, which have nothing to do with rationality, that a radical contrast between moral sentimentalism and moral rationalism can be upheld (see section 2). The second question concerns the exact role emotions are supposed to play in our ethical lives. Given the diversity of emotion types – think of the difference between hate, guilt and compassion, for instance – and the complexity of each particular emotion episode, it should not come as a surprise that emotions have been taken to play quite different roles in our ethical lives. Moreover, there are many sorts of entities which are likely to have interesting relations to emotions. For instance, one can think about the relation between emotions and a) moral judgements, such as the judgements concerning what agents ought to do or judgements about what is good or bad, admirable or despicable, etc., b) moral motivation and action, c) moral reasoning or deliberation about what to do, d) moral facts, such as the fact that an agent ought not to cheat, supposing that there are such facts, as well as e) character, and in particular virtuous and vicious traits, such as courage and cowardice. Emotions also play a role with respect to a number of *goods*, such as autonomy<sup>47,95,96</sup> or wellbeing.<sup>57,97</sup> Here, we focus on the role of emotions in moral judgements and in moral motivation.

According to a number of philosophers, moral judgements, or at least a specifiable group of these judgements, are reducible to, constituted by, or identical with emotion.<sup>98,99</sup> Observe in passing that these approaches represent the exact inversion of judgemental theories of emotions, according to which emotions are constituted by or identical to evaluative or normative judgements (see section 2)). This option has been attractive to proponents of *moral non-cognitivism*, the view that moral judgements do not have the function of stating facts and thus fail to be genuinely truth-assessable. As a view about judgements, moral non-cognitivism is distinct from, but congenial to, two important but controversial doctrines, which consider emotions to be central to ethics: *expressivism* (or *emotivism*), the semantic thesis that the function of moral sentences is to express emotions,<sup>100-102</sup> and *projectivism*, the view that morality *per se* is a projection of our emotions onto the world.<sup>103</sup>

In general, moral non-cognitivism, as well as emotivism and projectivism, are premised on two assumptions about the nature of emotions: first, that emotions lack representational content, which can be assessable in terms of truth or correctness; and, second, that emotions are essentially motivational states, so that by establishing a link to emotion, the motivational power of evaluative judgements, utterances or facts is supposed to be accounted for. This makes for a problem. As we

have observed above, the recent consensus in emotion theory is that there is ground to question these assumptions and to adopt an intentional account of emotions, such as the judgemental or the perceptual theory.

There are other ways to conceive the relation between moral judgements and emotions. On a promising account, which can be traced back to Franz Brentano,<sup>104</sup> moral concepts can be analysed in terms of the concept of emotions that are fitting or appropriate to their object. There are different ways to spell out what has become known as *neo-sentimentalism* or *fitting attitude analyses*. In a nutshell, the claim is that equivalences like the following hold in virtue of the concepts that are involved: x is fearsome if and only if x is such as to make fear appropriate, and similarly x is admirable if and only if x is such as to make admiration appropriate.<sup>105-107</sup> In order to spell out such approaches, one must of course specify what it is for emotions to be appropriate. This has proven particularly tricky, for a good account needs to avoid an important objection, which emphasises that an emotion such as admiration might well be appropriate with respect to something that is far from admirable. It can for instance be useful to admire one's rich acquaintance's yacht if one wants to be invited on board, but this has little to do with its genuine admirableness.<sup>107,108</sup> In response, it has been argued that the notion of appropriateness at stake has to be defined in terms of the notion of the correctness of emotions with respect to their objects.<sup>109,110</sup>

The main attraction of an approach along these lines is that it promises to make room for two apparently conflicting features of moral judgements, namely their motivational force and their cognitive character. Moral judgements appear to be on a par with paradigmatic cognitive judgements, such as judgements about shapes and colours, but they also seem to have a special relation to motivation. In principle, we expect that someone who judges that he ought to help a friend will be motivated accordingly, and the same is true if someone judges that it is shameful not to help. Someone who fails to be motivated accordingly seems to suffer from a kind of practical irrationality, such as weakness of will.<sup>111</sup> This feature of moral judgements is something that can, it seems, be explained in terms of the connection between the judgement and the motivation standardly involved in emotion.

The account of moral judgements in terms of fitting or appropriate emotions postulates a conceptual connection between moral concepts and emotion concepts. Other accounts are more empirically oriented. They aim at establishing causal relations between emotions and moral judgements. Experiments in social psychology suggest that emotions have a huge impact on our moral judgements. Whether we consider a practice to be morally doubtful depends at least in part on whether we feel disgust towards that practice.<sup>112,113</sup> However, the causal relation between

emotions and moral judgements should not be taken to go in one direction only, for the judgements we make given our education and socialisation are likely to influence our emotional reactions. What we see as morally wrong, for instance, will tend to trigger negative reactions.

Quite generally, recent debates suggest that both our emotions and our rational faculties contribute to our moral judgements. The difficult question concerns the exact contribution of emotions and reason in moral judgements. Insofar as the central notion in neo-sentimentalism is that of an appropriate emotion, which is fitting to its object, this approach makes room for rational assessment of emotions. The same is true of recent suggestions concerning the causal mechanisms that are responsible for moral judgements. According to one of the most prominent recent accounts, which has been proposed by Shaun Nichols, the mechanism responsible for “core moral judgements”, which concern prohibition of harm, depend both on our emotions and our rational capacities.<sup>113</sup>

Philosophers have also been interested in the roles of specific emotions, such as pity, compassion and sympathy;<sup>113-115</sup> love,<sup>85,116-118</sup> and respect,<sup>119,120</sup> on the positive side, and shame;<sup>121,122</sup> guilt;<sup>123-124</sup> disgust;<sup>125</sup> envy;<sup>126</sup> resentment and indignation,<sup>127,128</sup> on the negative side. Even though the focus has mostly been on their motivational impact, each of these emotion kinds raises specific questions regarding their moral importance. Moreover, depending on the favoured ethical theory, different kinds of emotion have been considered central.<sup>129</sup> Thus, deontologists, according to whom the right action is defined in terms of absolute rules, have tended to focus on the attitude of respect, and more specifically on the Kantian notion of respect for the moral law.<sup>130</sup> From a consequentialist perspective, according to which the right action is the one that has the best overall consequences, the focus has been, mainly following Hume<sup>94</sup>, on fellow-feelings such as pity and compassion, but also on what Mill<sup>131</sup> considered internalized punishments, such as shame and guilt. Finally, virtue ethicists, who focus not so much on right action as on character, have underlined the role of a great many emotions in the exercise of virtues and vices.<sup>132</sup> Courage, for instance, is plausibly taken to involve not so much as the absence of fear as the right degree of fear. Virtue ethicists have also been the first to promote the idea that emotions cannot just be taken as given, but need attention and education, an idea that can be traced back to Aristotle.<sup>29,115,121,133,134</sup>

## Conclusion.

In spite of the importance of emotions in the work of a great many major figures in the history of philosophy – Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Hume all offer detailed accounts of the emotions – contemporary philosophical interest in the emotions is relatively recent. Yet, since the seminal works of David Lyons<sup>16</sup>, Robert Gordon<sup>135</sup> and Ronald de Sousa,<sup>28</sup> the philosophical literature on

emotion has exploded. From what used to be considered a relatively unimportant and extremely messy terrain likely to defeat any attempts at systematic theorizing, emotions have become one of the favourite playgrounds of philosophers, who have recognized the importance of deepening our understanding of this fundamental aspect of human life. This is manifest in the variety and richness of the debates around which the contemporary philosophical discussions are structured. How should we understand the relations between emotions and other affective phenomena? What is distinctive in the way emotions relate us with our surroundings? If we endorse the idea that emotions display an intimate relation to evaluative properties, how best to model this relation? Are emotions apt to play significant epistemological roles vis-à-vis the evaluative judgements they typically lead us to make? How should we understand the kinds of social influences to which emotions unquestionably lend themselves? Do emotions motivate us essentially, or is their relation to motivation much looser? What sort of link to motivation do moral judgements have and how does this constrain our conception of the relations between emotions and morality? In the short space of this overview, we have had more than one opportunity to highlight how deeply connected these various issues are. It justifies the renewed interest in emotions of philosophers, psychologists, neurologists and others, while at the same time testifying to the complex challenges that must be faced by philosophical approaches to them.

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