

Emotion – Another Entranceway into Philosophy*

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The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion, edited by Peter Goldie and published by Oxford University Press in 2010, gathers scientific contributions from a broad and various group of researchers. More precisely, this book brings together thirty chapters organized in six parts: 1. “What Emotions Are”; 2. “The History of Emotion”; 3. “Emotions and Practical Reason”; 4. “Emotions and the Self”; 5. “Emotion, Value, and Morality”; 6. “Emotion, Art, and Aesthetics”.

In his introduction, Peter Goldie remarks that “philosophical research in the emotions is now extremely active and productive” (p. 1). This situation is quite interesting because not very long ago, philosophy – especially the philosophy of mind (the editor’s and most of contributors’ affiliation) – rejected any preoccupation with emotion. The reason for this state of affairs is the ambiguity of emotions:

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these are in the same time mental and bodily acts, being difficult to distinguish between the mental and the bodily component. The philosophy of mind generally refused to investigate emotion, leaving this duty mainly to phenomenology; and when it did analyze it, the philosophy of mind has preferred to assimilate emotion to “more familiar (and supposedly better understood) kinds of mental state such as belief and desire, leaving the ‘feeling’ side of emotions to the psychologists.” (p. 1)

There are four reasons for philosophy’s change of attitude: 1. The philosophy of mind interfered with other disciplines, such as psychology, neurosciences, linguistics, and anthropology, which studied emotions and emotionality much closer; 2. Philosophy became aware of the importance of emotion in practical reason because, on the one hand, there has been found that a decision cannot be accomplished if it is not sustained by an emotion, and, on the other hand, emotions are faster adaptive responses related to intelligence; 3. The recalling of Aristotle and Hume’s sentimentalist psychology after a long period of Kantian morality domination is another reason; 4. Connection between aesthetics and ethics represents another reason, due to the fact that aesthetic emotion and moral emotion are linked to one another.

Part I focuses on “what emotions are,” two major research directions: a) one which originates in William James’s argument, according to which emotions are “bodily feelings or perceptions of bodily feelings” (p. 4); b) one which emerges from Aristotle and the Stoics, according to which “emotions are cognitive, world-directed intentional states.” John Deigh’s article, “Concepts of Emotions in Modern Philosophy and Psychology” underlines the idea that understanding emotions also implies conceiving them as products of moral education. In “The Thing Called Emotion,” Aaron Ben-Ze’ev develops his own theory: emotions are prototypical, a “unique kind of mental mode.” Roddy Cowie’s major concern in “Describing the Forms of Emotional Colouring that Pervade Everyday Life” is the way to obtain a clear understanding of how emotions function in

daily life. For Ronald de Sousa, in “The Mind’s Bermuda Triangle: Philosophy of Emotions and Empirical Science”, philosophy by itself cannot ensure a reliable grasp of emotions; it is by interchange with science that emotion equivocation can clear out.

Part II explores the importance of the history of philosophy in tackling with emotions. In Plato and Aristotle, defends A. W. Price, emotions involve both body and soul. Christopher Gill points out that Stoic cognitivism excludes any role of emotions in what concern “human physiology, interpersonal and social relations.” Peter King offers a panoramic view of the theories of emotion in The Middle Ages, from Augustine to Anselm and Abelard, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham and later Scholasticism. Kate Abramson defends Hume and his “sentimental contemporaries” against Kantian charges that have in view the sentiments of disdain, shame and contempt. For phenomenology, states Anthony Hatzimoysis, emotions play an essential role in our relation to the world. For Sartre, emotions go hand in hand with a reflective engagement with our world experiences. Louis Charland focuses on the role of “passions” nowadays, considering them a “necessary theoretical posit and category in affective science” (p. 6).

Part III focuses on the role of emotions in practical reason. Although emotions are not non-rational impulses, they conflict with reason, obvious with regard to the weakness of will. Another question deals with the motivating role of emotions and with its accomplishment. John Elster sustains the idea of an adjustment of the standard model of action by taking the motivating role of emotion into account. Hence, action can be affected by weakness of will, desire, or “temporary preference reversal,” while beliefs can be influenced by “wishful thinking”, but also by the “cases where the urgency of emotion unduly influences the processes of information-gathering” (p. 7). For Sabin Doring even if emotions do not have a rational role, they have an epistemic function regarding action. The conflict between emotions and “reasons” might be productive and profitable if we are aware of it. Christine Tappolet uses the case

of fear in order to refute two theses: *motivational modularity* (according to which emotions are manifestations of innate behavioral dispositions) and *motivational egoism* (emotions work just for the organism itself). Her analysis of fear proves that emotions are learned and altruistic.

Part IV, “Emotions and the Self”, is about how important emotions are for each of us, at least for their epistemic role in “guiding us towards knowledge in our engagement with the world” (p. 8). Matthew Ratcliffe underlines the special importance of the *mood*. Doing so, he distinguishes between mood and emotions; since emotions are intentional states, moods are “part of the background structure of intentionality and are presupposed by the possibility of intentionally directed emotions” (p. 8). David Pugmire addresses the important question concerning the relation between emotions and language. Can emotions be changed by giving them “verbal form”? Are emotions ineffable and distorted by putting them in words? All these represent some of the main questions raised by David Pugmire. For Adam Morton emotions – curiosity, for instance – have intellectual virtues. Their role is to make us acquire true beliefs. Anyway, knowledge without this kind of epistemic emotions would be shallower.

The same view is shared by Michael Stocker who writes about “intellectual emotions” – such as pleasure, delight, love of truth, and interest. There are, nevertheless, other emotions, which have nothing to do with the intellectual domain, such as anger, jealousy, and courage. He thinks, though, that “intellectual emotions are essential to successful intellectual activity.”

In “A Plea for Ambivalence”, Amelie Rorty claims that ambivalence (always associated with emotions) is not by its nature something bad, but on the contrary – something very useful and worth deploying in the public sphere.

Peter Hobson sustains that distinctions between feeling, thought, cognition and motivation are artificial and he argues, with regard to infants, that these are “inextricably linked”, situation which also holds for adulthood.

Part V, “Emotion, Value, and Morality”, as the whole Handbook, is by no means Kantian: no one considers that emotions represent our “animal” side and that the true morality means to be delivered by any emotion. On the contrary, the role of emotions in knowledge, evaluation, and moral life is assumed as such.

In “Emotion and Values”, Kevin Mulligan focuses on the relation between emotions and values, taking into account three major aspects: a) the role of emotion in the knowledge of value; b) possible appropriate emotions through which a value can be understood; c) intrinsically valuable emotions. Jerome Neu is wondering if emotions may be controlled; if not, how can some of them be commanded, in the same manner the love for our enemies is commanded in The Bible?

Jesse Prinz asks whether there are moral emotions, as Stocked asks about intellectual emotions. Patricia Greenspan underlines the role of our innate, basic emotions in early moral learning, telling us that these emotions are far from being rigid and invariable patterns of responses, but on the contrary very flexible and shapeable. Robert Roberts assumes that emotions are perceptions of value with propositional structure.

Part VI, “Emotion, Art, and Aesthetics” raises the problem of connections between emotion and art. Emotions stand on both sides of an artwork: a) the creator’s side, being understood that he expresses some emotions through his work; b) the receiver’s side, being known that emotions are involved in the perception of any work of art. An intriguing question regards the relation in which these sides stand.

Derek Matravers in “Expression in the Arts” focuses on the first part of this relation, more precisely on “the way in which emotions are manifest in artworks, and in particular in music and painting.” Susan Feagin and Jenefer Robinson, in “Affects in Appreciation”, refer to the other side of the artistic process, the affective responses to artwork – literature and music. Starting with the example of emotions furnished by music, Jenefer Robinson remarks that in this context of art we experience emotions which are not linked to an object, in other

words “we are saddened by music, just as we are saddened by the loss or something we value.” (p. 11) Robinson believes that this kind of response implies *moods* rather than emotions.

In conclusion, we have here a very important contribution to the field of philosophy of emotion, a contribution that cannot be neglected by any serious researcher. Philosophy of emotion represents an alternative way of accessing emotion, so necessary nowadays, when psychology still holds the foreground of this investigation area.

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