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THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE EMOTIONS: A VIEW FROM PHILOSOPHY

EMOTIONS REVEALED: RECOGNIZING FACES AND FEELINGS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND EMOTIONAL LIFE. By *Paul Ekman*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002, 270 pp., \$26.00.

ALCHEMIES OF THE MIND: RATIONALITY AND THE EMOTIONS. By *Jon Elster*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 417 pp., \$19.95.

THE EMOTIONS: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION. By *Peter Goldie*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 265 pp., \$55.00 hardcover; 272 pp., \$18.95 paperback.

THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN: THE MYSTERIOUS UNDERPINNINGS OF EMOTIONAL LIFE. By *Joseph LeDoux*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, 303 pp., \$25.00 hardcover; \$14.00 paperback.

UPHEAVALS OF THOUGHT: THE INTELLIGENCE OF EMOTIONS. By *Martha C. Nussbaum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 714 pp., \$40.00 hardcover, \$27.00 paperback.

ON THE EMOTIONS. By *Richard Wollheim*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 224 pp., \$30.00.

The function of reason is to allow expressions of certain passions at the expense of others.

—NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*

Until recently the emotions were consigned to a small backyard of the mental that was visited only by philosophers. Jon Elster points out that Aristotle named the features of the emotions, and set the

questions, which continue to guide inquiry: the relation among emotion, belief, and desire, and between emotion and action; the presence of cognitive antecedents; the nature of the intentional objects; the place of bodily arousal and physiological expression; the connection with pain and pleasure. Can emotions be said to be rational or irrational? Are they passive or active, in or out of our control? Are they educable? Then, sometime in the sixties, the subject heated up. Philosophers again were the vanguard, joined by psychologists, neuroscientists, and, of course, psychoanalysts, who, having long lamented their lack of a coherent theory of the emotions, suddenly acquired many allies.

The subject of the emotions is thorny in part because it forces us to the mind-body problem in a way that other mental states like belief do not. For one thing, emotions are often, though not always, experienced viscerally, our connection with the external world vibrating in our bodies. For another, they run a gamut from primitive rat fear to the sophisticated complexity of Marcel's jealousy or Emma Bovary's boredom. Paul Ekman (1998) tells us that for most of the century after Darwin wrote *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, scientists ignored his work because they thought that in attributing emotions to animals he had anthropomorphized them. But slighting crucial differences between our pets and us is also a danger.

Every mind is a brain, but not every brain is a mind. This is because the concept of mind is needed to capture that special complexity that enters into the description and explanation of the behavior of creatures who, like us, can be self-reflective and have thoughts of a propositional character, and who communicate with each other in ways that such thought uniquely makes possible. The fact that beliefs enter into human emotions greatly expands the emotional repertoire available to us: whereas animals can have beliefs only about real, physical objects, the objects of human beliefs may be observed or unobservable, physical or mental, real or imagined (Elster 1999): "If we had taken the left turn instead of the right we would be home by now." "I am an evil person for wishing him harm." "Oz must be beautiful." Furthermore, need, wish, and emotion often inspire in us flights of imagination, as they surely do not in other animals, that in turn engender other emotions. Shame, for example, may breed omnipotent defensive fantasies that are then the source of disappointment, fear, and further shame. Any adequate theory of the emotions must allow for some continuity between human and other creatures, and also some pretty big gaps;

it must allow for the complexity of the mind-body issue. Indeed all the books referred to here do.¹

I want to begin not with philosophy but with research by Joseph LeDoux (1998) on the neurobiology of fear. The work may not generalize to all the emotions, though he thinks it probably does. LeDoux's findings, which I present in highly abbreviated form, help me set the stage for a discussion of most of the questions that Aristotle raised so long ago.

From stimulus, let's say a snake in the road, to fear, there are two neural pathways, both converging in the amygdala, the part of the brain that causes visceral and behavioral emotional responses. One path takes "the low road" from emotional stimulus to the amygdala, bypassing cognition and thought entirely:

The emotional meaning of a stimulus can begin to be appraised by the brain before the perceptual systems have fully processed the stimulus. It is, indeed, possible for your brain to know that something is bad before it knows exactly what it is. . . . The brain mechanisms through which memories of the emotional significance are registered, stored, and retrieved are different from the mechanisms through which cognitive memories of the same stimuli are processed [p. 69].

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The second path goes through the thalamus and then to the neocortex, the thinking part of the brain, whose job is to prevent an inappropriate response. This means, for one thing, being able to discriminate events that were merely part of the context of something dangerous in the past from the danger itself. The organism receives a stimulus, forms a belief about its significance, perhaps reflects on it, and then reacts. The high road is necessary for such cognitively laden emotions as shame, guilt, disappointment, and jealousy.

In evolutionary terms, the low road is older; it is automatic, unreflective, speedy, allowing the organism to respond quickly to a perception of danger: LeDoux tells us that in a rat it takes about twelve milliseconds for an acoustic stimulus to reach the amygdala by the lower route, and about twice as long through the cortical pathway (p. 63). By the same token, the lower road is less discriminating, less flexible, less subject to learning, and, because emotion systems learn by association, more prone to error. "When an emotionally arousing

¹I should say that the works I discuss by no means exhaust the interesting and useful philosophic literature.

stimulus is present, other stimuli that are also present acquire emotion-arousing qualities,” which may under certain conditions dispose the creature to avoid things that are not the ones that in fact are dangerous (LeDoux 2002, p. 303). But however stimuli arrive, it is the amygdala that appraises emotional meaning.

To explain further how these emotional pathways work requires a brief rehearsal of two kinds of memory, an idea by now familiar to most psychoanalysts. Memory may be explicit, conscious, and declarative, like remembering the day your grandmother became ill, and what you did then; or it may be implicit, unconscious, and procedural, like remembering how to ride a bike, or to be careful of fire.² An animal that is afraid of fire because it has been burned by fire is responding appropriately to a real danger. But because stimuli occur in contexts, the animal may be conditioned to fear a stimulus that is not dangerous if in the past it has been accompanied by something else that is. For example, you were once in a traumatic train wreck immediately after you heard a loud whistle, and now you become afraid when you hear such a sound all by itself, though you may not remember the train wreck, or know why you are afraid. If the memory is explicit and declarative, you are reminded of the trip, where you were going, whom you were with. You also remember that you were frightened, but you are not necessarily frightened now. Present emotion kicks in with implicit memory. The taste of the madeleine does not merely recall the past to Marcel, it evokes it emotionally now; bending down to tie his shoe suddenly reminds him of an incident with his grandmother some time before she died and releases the tears he could not shed for her then.

Implicit emotional memories and explicit memories of emotional experiences meet in working memory, where potentially they can be modified into a new explicit long-term memory that is not emotionally disturbing, for “once in working memory, memories and thoughts can

²There are distinctions to be made here that I am glossing over. (1) While cognitive scientists use the distinctions between implicit/explicit and procedural/declarative as if they were synonymous, Westen and Gabbard (2002) point out that there are ways in which they diverge. (2) Explicit memories themselves can be generic (or “semantic”) or episodic. (3) One kind of implicit memory is procedural, another is associative. Though both are called “implicit,” they apparently involve distinct neural mechanisms. Nor does either of these distinctions match up with that between conscious and unconscious. Westen and Gabbard caution us to distinguish between type of knowledge—of what is the case or of how to do something—and the way the knowledge is stored, namely, with or without conscious awareness. Declarative/procedural refers to the first, explicit/implicit to the second. Procedural knowledge can be either conscious or unconscious.

... influence activity back down the processing hierarchy” (p. 29). But there is a gap between our advanced cognitive capacities and the older emotional and motivational systems, which is why “downward causation” is such work. If either the emotional triggers or their implications go unnoticed, the amygdala may be stimulated in the absence of explicit memory or conscious feeling. And while the two neurological paths often work together, they need not; when they don’t, emotional memories may be formed on the basis of stimuli that do not represent current dangers. You are afraid, you respond defensively, even though, were fear not already narrowing your perceptions, you might realize there is nothing to be afraid of. In such a case you are emotionally off base, disordered. As Freud famously put it, one’s troops are lingering at the last battle.

Freud thought the essence of an emotion is that we are aware of it. But unlike both Damasio (1994) and LeDoux, and indeed most of the authors discussed here, Freud made no distinctions between emotion and feeling, or emotions as dispositions and emotions as mental states (Wollheim 1999), or emotions and emotional episodes (Goldie 2000). It is feeling that is, by definition, conscious, not emotion as the process that eventuates in feeling. Nor need one be conscious of just what the object of the feeling is.

Some of the implications of LeDoux’s theory for psychoanalysis are obvious:

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and the various conditioning theories all assume that anxiety is the result of traumatic learning experiences that foster the establishment of anxiety-producing long-term memories. In this sense, psychoanalytic and conditioning theories have drawn similar conclusions about the origin of anxiety. However, the two kinds of theory lead two different therapeutic approaches. Psychoanalysis seeks to make the patient conscious of the origins of inner conflict, whereas behavior therapy . . . tries to rid the person of the symptoms . . . through various forms of conditioning [p. 263].

Though the amygdala’s emotional memories may never be erased, their effects can be modified if a narrative context is recovered or created that gives the stimulus a new meaning. Therapy “does not erase the memory that ties fear reactions to trigger stimuli . . . [but] rather prevents the stimuli from unleashing the fear reaction” (p. 146).

In short, the alarm signals that have set the emotion in process can at a certain point be appraised and disconfirmed, with the consequence

that the feeling of fear itself is qualified. In psychoanalytic terms: stereotypical behavior is repeated because we have not given up childhood wishes, beliefs, goals, and automatic, defensive strategies. The clinical setting may provide a situation of safety in which old emotions can be reexperienced, and the stories that embed them articulated and appraised. Clyman (1991) suggests that “transference is the enactment of the emotional procedures learned in childhood,” and that “ego functions, defenses, repression, and the repetition compulsion can all be profitably viewed from the perspective of procedural knowledge” (p. 367).

While LeDoux’s model works for animals that are much simpler than we are, it can provide us with a sketch for a theory that applies to us as well. Let me summarize what I take to be LeDoux’s principal points: (1) The emotional system, in which perception plays a part, appraises the external world for things that are of vital importance to the organism. Emotions, that is, vitally engage us with the external world, and cannot be construed as merely internal interruptions. (2) These appraisals may be automatic, unconscious, nonverbal, and nondeclarative; but for creatures capable of propositional thought they can be at the same time declarative, cognitively laden, triggered by belief, and conscious. (3) Emotions have a history, the complexity of which will reflect the mental complexity of the organism. (4) They form part of the motivational system. (5) They can be disordered so as to lead the organism to respond to something as a danger that in fact is not. (6) They are subject to learning, though to a limited extent. To these six points I should add a distinction between emotion and feeling that figures, though made somewhat differently in each case, in most of the books discussed below. The distinction is roughly this: feelings are what we consciously experience and are only a part of the emotional process as a whole.³

“Appraisal” suggests the major cluster of themes that runs through all the philosophical treatments of the emotions: their cognitive character, their relation to belief and practical reasoning, their rationality or irrationality. All the works I refer to elaborate these themes in valuable

³William James first drew a distinction between emotion and feeling, only to collapse it. Rather than saying, as our authors here do, that emotions give rise to feelings, James said that an emotion just is the experience of noting that we are viscerally aroused in a particular way. In contemporary work on the emotions, “affect” usually refers to episodic, automated responses, accompanied by expressive facial changes and changes in the autonomic nervous system.

ways. But if you were to read just one, I would recommend *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, by Peter Goldie. He raises the important issues, presents incisive arguments for and against a number of the reigning positions, discusses the relevant literature from neurobiology and psychology, and concludes his reflection in an elegant two hundred forty-one pages. (Martha Nussbaum's magisterial, operatic, *Upheavals of Thought* ends on p. 714, not counting an extensive, and useful, bibliography.) Goldie's project is to stay as close as possible to the concepts of emotion, belief, and desire as we use them in everyday life to explain our own and one another's behavior. One mark of his success is the book's readability. (Elster [p. 406] points out that our interest in the laboratory may lead us to forget that the emotions not only need to be explained but are themselves explanatory.)

According to Goldie, "an emotion—for example, John's being angry at Jane or Jane's being in love—is typically *complex, episodic, dynamic, and structured*" (pp. 12–13). It is complex in that it typically involves a number of different elements, including perceptions, thoughts, bodily changes, and dispositions. It is episodic and dynamic in that the elements change, wax and wane, come and go, depending on a number of different factors. I might say that among mental dispositions and states, the emotions uniquely reveal the essential temporality of the mind. It is structured in that "it constitutes part of a narrative—roughly, an unfolding sequence of actions and events, thoughts and feelings—in which the emotion itself is embedded" (p. 13). We might like a neater definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, but one thing of which these books taken together persuade you is that no such definition is possible.

The narrative character of emotions suggests to Goldie the useful idea that our explanations of emotions and actions need ideas of intelligibility, appropriateness, and proportionality, as well as the idea of rationality (p. 3). In learning something of your past, your risks and losses, how the world looks to you, how over the years your experiences and memories have been interwoven and embroidered, I may come to understand your envy, or why my seemingly innocuous remark set you off, or why you started running when you heard the train whistle, even though what you did might be irrational. I am reminded here of Ronald de Sousa's resonant idea (1987) that every person's emotional responses are a function of something he calls paradigm scenarios, "little dramas in which our natural capacities for emotion

response were first enlisted” (p. 48). On de Sousa’s account, emotional irrationality is a function of perceiving a new situation in terms of an inappropriate paradigm scenario, a formulation that psychoanalysts and LeDoux as well might accept.

Belief is usually an important element in an emotional complex. But an overemphasis on belief, in particular on a certain understanding of intentionality, Goldie argues, misconstrues emotions and overrationalizes them. Intentionality, usually thought by philosophers to be a hallmark of the mental, refers to two characteristics peculiar to mental predicates like belief, desire, and intention: *semantic opacity* and *the ability to take nonexistent objects*. The technical term *semantic opacity* names the fact that while typically we can substitute co-referring terms without changing the truth value of the sentence in which they occur, this is not so in sentences containing mental predicates. For example: If it is true that Oedipus killed the old man at the crossroads, then, necessarily, it is also true that he killed Laius, and his own father, and the king of Thebes, and the husband of Jocasta, and so on, since all these descriptions refer to the same person. But if the truth about whom Oedipus *believed* he killed, or *intended* to kill, or *felt guilty* about killing, is in question, then everything turns on how the old man at the crossroads is described; for we have beliefs, intentions, and some emotions about things only under certain descriptions, *as seen* (by us) in certain ways. Oedipus believed at the time that he was killing the old man at the crossroads; he did not believe at the time that he was killing his father, Laius, the king of Thebes. Only later did he make these emotionally catastrophic discoveries. What’s in a name? Sometimes everything.

Semantic opacity refers to this peculiar complexity of mental states. Not all emotions have so fine-grained a texture; presumably those of prelinguistic children or rats do not. But many emotions do. Language makes available to us a new order of response to ourselves and the world, which is why any theory of the emotions must be able to accommodate, as LeDoux’s does, by the way, some critical differences between human beings and other creatures.

Second, like beliefs, emotions may be about nonexistent objects: I can be afraid of the devil, even though there is no such being.

An account of emotion needs to go this far with intentionality, but not farther: usually intentionality is construed, in linguistic terms, as an attitude toward propositions. If I believe that it is raining, the content of my belief is the proposition *that* it is raining, and the attitude

toward the proposition is belief, rather, for example, than desire (awkwardly expressed as “I desire it to be the case that it is raining”). Emotions may take propositions as their objects—“I feel ashamed that I want to embarrass you.” But they can also be directed immediately to persons and things: in loving you it may be you that I love, and not some fact about you. Furthermore, Goldie argues, to construe emotions as propositional attitudes omits the subjective, first-person, narrative, phenomenal character of an emotion, how it feels to be disposed toward the world, or a part of it, in an angry or a sad or a jealous way. Unlike belief, Richard Moran (1988) remarks, “an emotional attitude constitutes something closer to a total orientation of the self, the inhabiting of a particular perspective” (p. 181). Goldie characterizes the intentionality peculiar to the emotions as a *feeling toward*, which “is thinking of with feeling” (p. 20). The presence of intentionality distinguishes emotions from the kinds of feelings that are bodily pain; the peculiar nature of their intentionality distinguishes them from beliefs and desires.

Feeling toward, Goldie insists, is not something that our analysis of emotion can just tack on to the content of some attitude like belief or desire; rather, the content of a feeling of sadness or guilt would not be what it is unless it were being experienced. The idea is that the content of your jealousy concerning Albertine is different from the content of my jealousy concerning Albertine, no matter how finely we spell out the propositional content in both cases. Contrast this with belief: the content of your belief that it was raining in Spain on the fifth of May and my belief that it was raining there and then is the same, *that* it was raining, there and then. (It is because of this subjective, narrative quality that novelists are typically better than psychologists at describing an emotional state. For example, only the understanding we have gained of Ivan’s character from *The Brothers Karamazov* as a whole gives us the peculiar texture of his horror when he sees Smerdyakov at the garden wall. Goldie, Nussbaum, and Elster, by the way, all give us beautiful literary examples.)

A phenomenologist might say that an emotion sets the horizon against which we see the world; it guides perceptions in such a way that they make sense of the emotional attitude. On this point Goldie invokes Sartre, who compares fear, for example, with looking for a hidden shape, say the shape of a gun. It is a *seeing as*, a prereflective consciousness of the world in which the “‘emotion returns to the object every moment and feeds upon it” (p. 59). I want to ask, then, do emotions

restrict what we see, or illumine it? Are they our impositions on the world, or acts of discernment? Both, with differences in degree from case to case. Certain emotions by their very nature narrow the field of vision: in rage, anxiety, or fear, my attention fastens on only a small part of the world now in front of me. In addition, as we have seen in the paradigm case from LeDoux, when my emotional responses are largely determined by the past, I am less perceiving *now* than remembering *then*: I hear the whistle only as foreboding a danger long past. Beliefs and perceptions can be part of the causal story of an emotional reaction.

But the causality can also go the other direction: experiencing a feeling can itself foreclose or disclose reality. In their disclosing aspect, we might think of the emotions as a kind of sixth sense, allowing us to perceive aspects of the world that are perceptible in no other way. Heidegger (1927) was the first philosopher to advance such a view. He rejects the traditional distinction between “what is merely in me” and “what is really there, in the objective world”; rather: the “objective” world is saturated with “emotional” qualities, as the perceiver is embedded in the objective world. When a situation amuses me, or makes me sad, or indignant, I may be responding to qualities of it that cannot be articulated in words and that you may not be picking up if it leaves you cold. If the emotions do constitute such a sense, then an impoverished emotional life yields an impoverished perception of reality.

We have said that emotions are often aroused, in part, by beliefs, and that they are open to reflection in ways that may alter one’s feelings and behavior. The emotions, then, are potentially educable. This is the central subject in Martha Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, the most ambitious of the books I discuss. She gives an account that she thinks allows for a range of emotional expression all the way from mice to music, drawing for her argument on philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Spinoza, and contemporary work by Robert Gordon, Patricia Greenspan, Ronald de Sousa, Robert Solomon, John Deigh, Richard Wollheim, Paul Griffiths, and many others⁴); cognitive psychology and neurobiology (Ekman, LeDoux, and Damasio); psychoanalysis (Freud, Winnicott, Bowlby, and Daniel Stern); and literature (Dante, Emily Brontë, Whitman, Proust, and

⁴Two of these works that I do not discuss here may be of particular interest to psychoanalysts: Gordon (1987) on William James and S. Schachter, and Deigh (2001) on James and Freud.

Joyce). Even Gustav Mahler makes an extended appearance. This is a visionary book, guided by the dream of a society in which emotions like compassion and forgiveness can prevail, and it is this aspect of her book that sets it apart from the others.

In her introduction Nussbaum notes that

a lot is at stake in the decision to view emotions . . . as intelligent responses to the perception of value. If emotions are suffused with intelligence and discernment, and if they contain in themselves an awareness of value or importance, they cannot . . . be sidelined in accounts of ethical judgment, as they so often have been in the history of philosophy. Instead of viewing morality as a system of principles to be grasped by the detached intellect, and emotions as motivations that either support or subvert our choice to act according to principle, we shall have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning [p. 1].

The reader familiar with the arguments summarized above might raise an eyebrow at the claim that emotions are always intelligent responses to the perception of value, for we have to stretch the concepts both of intelligence and value a good way in order to accommodate automatic reactions and phobias. I'm not going to belabor this, however, because I want to concentrate on Nussbaum's larger vision. Calling on Damasio (1994) for support, Nussbaum claims that emotions are an essential part of practical reason, giving the creature a sense of how the world relates to its goals and projects. She doesn't deny that the emotions are stubborn, importunate, often disruptive of our relations to ourselves and certainly to others, a source of pain, and of intense but necessarily unreliable pleasure. Yet to the extent that they are cognitive, they are also open to reason, and this is the theme—one that again she sounds in common with Goldie and Elster—she wants to elaborate.

Nussbaum pursues her earlier defense of the Stoics (Nussbaum 1994), offering a view close to theirs according to which the emotions are “forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person's own control great importance for the person's own flourishing . . .” (p. 22); they are concerned with things “that can be affected by events in the world beyond the person's own control, things that can arrive by surprise, that can be destroyed even when one does not wish it” (p. 42). (This idea was anticipated some years ago by Robert Gordon [1987], but Nussbaum greatly amplifies it.) Nussbaum's therapeutic project is different from the Stoics', however. They thought

we could learn that things in the external world do not have the value we give them, and that in withdrawing our interest we might be less at passion's mercy. Plato similarly tried to teach us that what is lovable in a person is not his particular, fragile, embodied self, but rather those disembodied, eternal qualities of beauty and goodness that he shares with all good and beautiful things. But the Socrates who can turn his back on his lovers is not, Nussbaum argued in her brilliant *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), a model of the ideal human life. The only creatures who know their own vulnerability, we are also the only ones who wish to transcend it. But in doing that we turn our back on what is special about human reason itself. Nussbaum asks that instead of attempting to transcend vulnerability we acknowledge it, giving up the fantasies of omnipotence that foreclose empathy and fuel the destructive capacities of such emotions as anger, envy, and jealousy.

Yet acknowledgment has difficult preconditions. We are born to a world not of our making, and we become believing, desiring, impassioned creatures only through our relations with other such creatures, relations over which we have little control. The development of the benevolent emotions requires an early environment in which it is possible to accept one's limitations without a sense of shame. Nussbaum turns here to object relations theory, in particular to Bowlby, Winnicott, and Stern. The "good-enough mother" conveys to the child a sense that forgiveness and mercy are possible, and that the child is loved as a person in her own right.

She therefore need not fear that her human imperfection will cause the world's destruction. And because she is not stricken by annihilating shame at her own impotence, she will have less need for envy and jealousy, emotions that express her desire for omnipotent control of the sources of good: in this way, too, a benign cycle is established [p. 217].

Our sense of ourselves as agents who can have an effect on the world without resorting to violence, of ourselves as lovable, of the world as inhabitable, depends to some extent on our early object relations. And these in turn are embedded in the social fabric. An ideal society, it is implied, would be one relatively free of the gross injustices that aggravate the sense of impotence and shame, and diminish the capacity for compassion. The emotions group themselves, Nussbaum suggests, into those that expand the boundaries of the self to include other people, and those that constrict it, like shame, hate, and envy.

Nussbaum claims that “an intense form of object-love . . . underlies all the adult emotions and colors them” (p. 460). As stated, the claim is perhaps exaggerated. But what she may mean is that one’s emotional vocabulary, so to speak, is learned only in complex interpersonal relationships in which one’s early affects are or are not responded to, nourished, refined, tutored, articulated. Aristotle held, like Dewey many centuries later, that character is acquired to some extent by habit, which is trained in the nursery. That is where we learn to curb our anger. But it is also where envy and resentment, or, on the other hand, kindness, love, and empathy, are bred; where we learn to distinguish, if we do, between harm intentionally and accidentally done, between falling below someone else’s standards and failing our own, between a gift with a price tag and a gift of love, between a blow to our vanity and a mortal injury, between shame, embarrassment, and guilt.

The exuberant amplitude of Nussbaum’s book is both its virtue and its fault. Rich in insight and suggestion, it is also sprawling, repetitious, and often overwritten. Furthermore, in trying to arrive at a unified theory that will accommodate the complexity of emotions and the various branches of research, she loses touch, as I mentioned earlier, with the usual meaning of terms like *evaluation* and *judgment* that are central to her argument. As for the three hundred pages titled “Ascents of Love”—Proust, Plato, Spinoza, Dante, Emily Brontë, and Joyce, among others—some readers will find it the most valuable part of her book. Others may want to skim it.

Richard Wollheim describes the emotions as mental dispositions with a characteristic role and history. Their role, he wonderfully says, “is to provide the creature . . . with an orientation, or an attitude to the world. If belief maps the world, and desire targets it, emotion tints or colours it: it enlivens or darkens it, as the case may be” (p. 15). In emphasizing, with Nussbaum and Goldie, the unique historical character of every emotion, Wollheim continues to remedy the philosophy of mind along the line he pursued in *The Thread of Life* (1984), in which he insisted on the complex continuity of mental states that make up the unity of a person.

In this new book, Wollheim’s discussions of intentionality, the “moral” emotions of shame and guilt (of which he takes a Kleinian view), imagination, and unconscious fantasy are rich and subtle, as we would expect from this philosopher who has pioneered the borderland between philosophy and psychoanalysis. But I have complaints.

Wollheim attempts to elucidate all the emotions in terms of the satisfaction or frustration of desire, and this cannot help but lead him to some contorted accounts of negative emotions like disgust and fear. I am disgusted by the toad I find sitting on my chest (Wollheim's example) because I desire . . . not to be disgusted? I am afraid of flying because I desire . . . to feel safe? Furthermore, one encounters a thicket of distinctions at every turn, which makes the book difficult to read. Finally—my sharpest complaint—though Wollheim announces at the beginning that this is a book of “applied philosophy” that will appeal not only to conceptual analysis but also to “observation and experiment,” in fact he makes no reference to the vast research on the emotions. For a subject like this, which has no clear borders, such silence must limit the book's value.

Are the emotions rational or irrational? Active or passive? Things that befall me or things I in some sense do? Clearly the answers are complicated. When an emotion is based on a belief, it is subject to change through rational appraisal in the way that beliefs typically, though not always, are. Say that I am hurt and resentful because you snub me at a party. The motivating belief is that you deliberately ignored me, or at least preferred talking to someone else; the motivating desire, implicit, is to have been recognized by you. But now if I learn that you didn't deliberately ignore me, perhaps that you didn't even see me, my resentment fades (unless of course it masks resentment about something else). In such a case, emotion issues from beliefs and desires in something like the way that action does. The belief gives rational justification to the emotion, and my emotion changes with a change in the belief on which it is based. Contrast my resentment at being snubbed with a feeling of thirst or of physical pain. The latter are not the sorts of things that can be the outcome of reasoning.

In general, the concepts of agency, action, and rationality go together: when what I do is to some extent the outcome of a process of reasoning and reflection, I am performing an action rather than merely behaving, and for this action I can be held, in general and to some degree, responsible. I am active also with respect to my beliefs, some of my desires, and, under some conditions, my emotions, active not in the sense not that I have chosen to have them, but that they are aspects of myself as an agent in the world. When I am aware that a particular situation embarrasses me, for example, I can assess anew the situation, and assess also the values that my feelings reveal to me I have. Those of

our mental attitudes that are sensitive to reflection, and open to change under its influence, are just the ones that identify us as agents.

As we know, not all our emotions are sensitive to reflection. The person who is phobic of horses acts as if he believes they will harm him; but it seems arbitrary to insist that he does in the face of his denial that he has such a belief. "I can't help it," he says. "There's no use trying to convince me. The fear just has me in its grip." Elster suggests that an emotion may be irrational "in the sense that it would be irrational *were* it based on a belief that the agent himself thinks is false" (p. 269). We have been talking about ways in which the emotions can be tutored; but it would be shortsighted to overlook their unruly features. Among them, Elster suggests, are a tendency to act immediately that strong emotion creates, and the tendency for emotion to induce wish-fulfilling fantasy. (On the strategies of wishful thinking and self-deception in general, Elster is the master. Consider two of his earlier titles, *Sour Grapes* [1983] and *Ulysses and the Sirens* [1984].)

Fantasy plays a crucial role in the ways emotions can lead us astray. Here I again return to the difference LeDoux remarks between registering a perception emotionally, and understanding it cognitively. In the best of cases these are harmonious, and the narrative that comes with symbolization is flexible, open to revision. But this is not always how things go. The human need to make sense of our experience may lead us to shape our understanding to what we feel. Traditionally psychoanalysts have thought of fantasies as defensive and wish-gratifying in function, which at times they may be. But fantasy may also arise through the attempt to make sense of experience that for one reason or another is unintelligible, perhaps because other people have consistently failed to acknowledge, or have even actively denied, one's own feelings. Then a gap opens between what one really feels and what one thinks one feels, between world as felt and world as (mis)perceived or (mis)understood, world as subjectively (and mutely) experienced and world as publicly acknowledged. Fantasy enters the breach, engendering stories that are cut off or dissociated both from what one consciously believes and from dialogue with others. Such fantasies, and the beliefs they enclose, may therefore be peculiarly inflexible and resistant to learning.⁵ Psychoanalytic therapy hopes, partly through the transference relationship, to undo the dissociation so that what one

⁵I am indebted here to conversations with the philosopher Barry Smith.

feels may be both avowed and appraised. Our emotions have much to teach us both about the world and about ourselves, about what is happening that matters to us, and why.

As I was finishing the writing of this essay, I received the galleys of Paul Ekman's *Emotions Revealed, Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. The title conveys a strange and interesting combination of a how-to book and scholarly research. Some forty years ago Ekman famously pioneered studies on the facial expressions of emotions. He declared then that there are seven basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, surprise, joy, sadness, and possibly contempt, all of them expressed in facial expressions that can be recognized cross-culturally. "Basic" conveys the idea that our ability to signal our emotional responses to others is the adaptive product of evolution: our emotional capacities are hard-wired, though plastic and subject to learning to a certain degree. Ekman has continued his research, tracking down in fine detail, for example, just which muscle of the eyebrow or the lower lip is activated when one experiences one or another emotion. In pictures and text, he reports those discoveries.

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But Ekman has recently had an important experience that seems to have given his work a new urgency and color. He and a few other internationally renowned experts on the emotions were invited by the Dalai Lama to visit Dharamsala for a week's discussion of the emotions. Tibetan Buddhists are interested in training themselves to become aware of the unfolding of an emotion as early in the process as possible so that potentially destructive emotions like fear, anger, shame, contempt, envy, jealousy, and disappointment, sources not only of unhappiness in oneself but also of unkindness to others, can be modulated by conscious reflection. Researchers in the emotions share with him this interest in the trajectory from unconscious process to conscious feeling, and from there to overt expression. And perhaps because of the Dalai Lama's influence, Ekman's interests are now not simply theoretical but practical. He hopes to help us learn what our own particular emotional triggers are, to modulate our responses, and to interpret the facial expressions of others. Evolution has given us our overt expressiveness, we infer, as a valuable communicative tool; but we can learn to use it better. Ekman accompanies his text with helpful photographs, quizzes, and suggestions.

Freud's thinking about emotion, which he often seems to identify with affect (and both with "drive"), was straitjacketed by his hydraulic view of the mind and his reductionist assumptions about mind and

body. Emotions, he thought, are forces that press for discharge from within, where “within” refers not to the first-person, subjective aspect of mental life but to organic “drive”; ideas are not constitutive elements of emotions but are merely “soldered” onto them. An “unconscious” emotion, then, is one from which the ideational component has come loose and been repressed (Freud 1900, pp. 461–462). Freud’s revisionary work on anxiety (1926) contains the seeds of a radically different view, though he did not develop it. Earlier held to be the transformation of repressed libido, anxiety was now construed as a signal alerting the organism, in the first instance, to the presence of *external* dangers. Freud drew a developmental picture that named the chief dangers for the child, all of them essentially interpersonal, at each stage. The implications, which Freud did not draw, point in the direction I have been following in this essay: thoughts, beliefs, desires, typically play a constitutive role in the emotions, which vitally engage us with the external world and its creatures.

A consensus is growing that places emotion (rather than “drive”) at the heart of a theory of motivation (see Westen 1997). This emerging theory accommodates the fact that the child does not come equipped with a fixed repertoire of motives; it helps us understand both the flexibility and the fixity of human motivation; and, most important of all, it sees the individual as embedded in the world, becoming what she is only through interactions with other persons and things beyond her own skin. It promises a recasting of fundamental psychoanalytic concepts such as conscious and unconscious, ego and id, and certainly of reason.

In the name of reason we have been at war with the emotions for hundreds of years. Passions “blind,” “oppress” (reason is and must always be the slave of the passions, Hume said), wrench us from our true selves (“I am beside myself with anger, grief, worry”). In self-defense we suppress and repress, join monasteries, disown and deny, pray, repent and punish, ignore. Without question the emotions frequently distort and mislead perception. And though they arise from the self and were surely shaped by nature to serve the self’s interests, they are frequently destructive of both personal happiness and interpersonal solidarity. Nonetheless, as Elster eloquently remarks, “Emotions matter because if we didn’t have them, nothing else would matter” (p. 403). They help us know what we care about, and why. They call into question a certain picture of reason itself, reason as cold, unmotivated, at a distance from the world, detached from the body, an objectivity bereft

of feeling. An ideally rational person is not one who is dispassionate, but one whose passions have been educated in ways suggested by the authors considered in this essay. Our picture of ourselves is changing.

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