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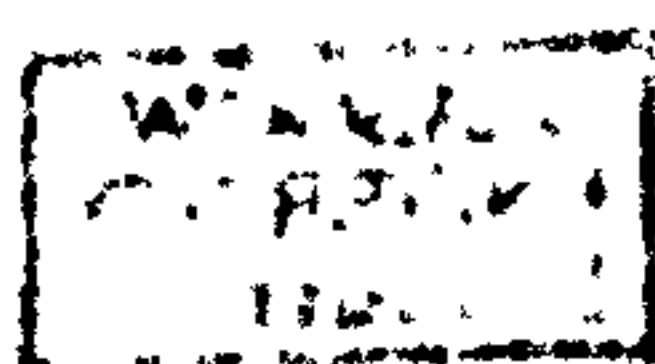
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# **The Nature and Value of Emotion.**

**Paul Harkin. 1998**

**Ph.D. Thesis in Philosophy  
Glasgow University.**



## Abstract.

“What is the nature of emotional states”? This thesis attempts to answer that question, by offering a “cognitive” theory of the emotions. That is; it emphasises the cognitive component of emotional states, and therefore argues that theories of emotion which regard them as falling outwith the category of the rational are mistaken. Against some current versions of cognitivism, however, I argue that the cognitive element is not a *belief*. The alternative account offered here argues that the cognitive element should be thought of as a “seeing-as”.

This account of the *nature* of emotional states leads to two further points. Firstly, it suggests an account of why emotional states are *valuable*. In elaborating such an account, I defend the claim that emotions offer a distinct kind of *cognitive* grasp not afforded by mere belief. I then consider an Aristotelian defence of this point in terms of the relationship between emotion and character. This sort of defence, I claim, is, however only partially successful; there remains a class of emotions whose value cannot be assessed in terms of the contribution they make to character. The second main point for which I argue is that psychological explanation generally must allow room for cognitive states other than belief. One result of a failure to do so, is, I claim, an inaccurate conception of the nature of rationality. In addition, a failure to acknowledge the role of other cognitive states leads to a tendency to ignore a range of types of conflict, both between emotional and beliefs and, more generally, between beliefs and other cognitive states. Lastly, I claim that, given the forgoing account of emotional understanding, we can see how the experience of artworks can offer understanding and contribute to the process of emotional education.

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## Introduction.

The ancient Greeks conceived of human psychology by means of an analogy with political organisation. For Plato, who elaborated the analogy in detail, warring forces fight for control of the human psyche; the desired outcome being order and correct functioning; the other, less desirable, result, subversion and tyranny of the human subject- the denial of freedom and self-mastery. Order results when the appropriate force - Reason, in Plato's view - triumphs and dominates, tyranny when it is usurped and denied. While this kind of analogy is no longer in detail part of our own popular conception of human psychology, the central picture of the psyche as a battleground where opposing forces are locked in continual struggle *is* familiar to us.

Although a great variety of kinds of conflict take place there- between obligation and desire, self-interest and altruism, long and short term benefit, and many others - one very general kind of opposition frames a multitude of more specific ones. This is the (alleged) conflict between Reason and Emotion. Our everyday talk is testimony to our belief that one part of the mind is held to be responsible for thinking in a general sense- solving problems, doing arithmetic and working out what we ought to believe- while another is a seething cauldron of natural forces which drive our desires and spill over every so often into uncontrollable outbursts.

These two aspects of our mental life are thought to be not merely distinct but antagonistic. Reason, on the one hand, is seen as controlled, benign and impartial, while emotion on the other is undisciplined, destructive and subjective. Reason is associated with our capacity to grasp the truth; "rationality" designates the methods we employ in thinking which seem most apt to lead to the formation of true beliefs. Emotion, by contrast, is credited with *subverting* this process and misleading the intellect. Passion, it is said, makes people unreasonable, and it is generally held as a truism that "getting emotional" is a barrier to correct thinking.

So much then is at least part of our everyday folklore concerning the emotions. But while it is of course undeniable that people often do act unreasonably while under the sway of emotional states (as they also do while *not* under their sway) it is a quite separate question whether emotional states are so completely without positive value as this picture implies. Underlying the view that they are, may be an implicit conception of



the sorts of things emotional states are. Many people, if asked to characterise emotions, resort to describing them in terms of feelings. This in turn suggests a tacit assimilation to sensations. If this is indeed the popular conception of the nature of emotional states, then it goes some way to explaining why they are thought to be brute forces of nature with no cognitive value. In what follows I shall argue that this popular conception is mistaken.

It is not clear whether “Folk psychology” is best thought of as a *theory* or not<sup>1</sup>. But if it is, it is a theory geared to effective prediction of the behaviour of others, and not primarily to fine distinctions between types of mental states. For this reason it is clear that most people have only the roughest idea of how to specify what emotions are, since our folk psychology does not seem to embody any detailed account of the kind of thing an emotion is. And this lack of clarity leads to some genuine puzzlement- for while there is broad agreement across a range of cases about which states are emotions and which are not, there is a distinct lack of clarity about others; are being interested or amused, desiring something, being puzzled also emotions? Whatever we finally say about these cases, we have no obvious criterion already at hand which will help us settle the matter.

Furthermore our inherited folk psychology is the product of a long history. The view that the mind is a composite of distinct elements or forces, is, for example, a notorious feature of much Enlightenment philosophy- both Hume and Kant are, in different ways, good examples of this- and is also familiar from Freudian psychology. As noted above, however, its origins can be traced much further back; at least as far as Plato’s tri-partite conception of the soul, with its divisions and consequent conflicts. But its roots may be still deeper and older. Russell points out<sup>2</sup> that Platonic rationalism and particularly the Pythagorean philosophy which inspired it, occupy ambiguous positions in the development of Greek thought and religion. Pythagoras, although one of the great innovators of rationalist mathematical thought, was also a reformer of the Orphic cult, while Orpheus was himself a reformer of the religion of Dionysus. And it was a tenet of both these cults that communion with the deity required *intoxication*- originally, physical intoxication through alcohol, but later spiritual intoxication- and that their

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<sup>1</sup> The debate between those who think it *is* a theory (The “Theory” theorists) and those who propose an account based on simulation, is now well advanced. I return to this issue in the final chapter.

<sup>2</sup> In *The History of Western Philosophy*, ch.1. Also on Plato’s relation to Pythagoras, see E. R. Dodds, “Plato and The Irrational Soul” p.209, in *The Greeks and The Irrational*.



rituals produced states known as “enthusiasms” which allowed the god to enter the worshipper. In this tradition, the path to spiritual truth involved an ecstasy of *passion*, through which the worshipper, as Russell puts it,

“... recovers an intensity of feeling which prudence had destroyed; he finds the world full of delight and beauty, and his imagination is suddenly liberated from the prison of everyday preoccupations.”

(HWP p.36)

The importance of this picture lies in its being one of the first recorded world views to articulate the conviction that grasping the structure of reality is essentially *passionate*; true understanding is not merely *intellectual*, but requires emotion. However, it is the rationalistic elements of Pythagoras’ teachings which proved more influential, through their influence on Plato, and it is in the tradition that stems from him that we find articulated the contrary view, that it is through the intellect alone that we grasp the truth about the world.

In the Dionysian conception we can see prefigured ideas which were much later to absorb the artists, writers and philosophers of the Romantic period; the opposition between society and the authentic, and between Reason and Passion. The emphasis on *excess*, which we find for example in Blake, and on *intoxication*- which looms large in Byron- are prefigured in the ancient Greeks. The complex of ideas known as Romanticism emerged in part at least from a rejection of the attitudes of the Enlightenment- in particular, in the present context, from a rejection of the identification of *humanity* with the power of *reason*. And as a result of our inheritance of these historical fragments, we find ourselves left with an often unnoticed ambivalence about the value of our emotional lives.

We are, for example, suspicious of emotion as a force which brings bias, muddleheaded thinking and inhibits objectivity. In respects such as these reason easily wins out over emotion. Yet at the same time, we live by our emotions and accord them overwhelming significance in our daily lives. Our deepest commitments are usually emotional ones; for most of us, the people we love, the achievements of which we are proud, the art which moves us, are the sorts of things which give life significance.

In other respects, however, we not only value emotion but tend to be suspicious of a *lack* of it. Those who cannot feel pity, love, shame or joy are felt to be deficient in some

way. The person who does not grieve or feel pity is seen as cold, lacking in real attachment to others. This absence is taken as a *failure* of some sort, and one we do not regard as superficial. Rather, we take empathy and a range of other emotional experiences as a sign that someone shares the same world as us. To be confronted with someone who does not share our emotional orientation towards the world in this way can be disturbing. In this respect, the psychopath lies at one end of a spectrum of emotional disorders- someone who is completely devoid of fellow feeling and empathy. And while we may attempt to minimise the significance of the psychopath by classifying his disorder as “pathological” or “organic”, we recognise that less extreme cases are both more familiar and nearer to us. Camus’ novel *L’etranger*, for example, features the (anti-) hero Mersault, whose most striking characteristic is his emotional alienation. Literature in general offers many examples, both of characters who struggle to come to terms with the undesirable emotions they have and others who attempt to understand their lack of emotion. In general then, we are torn between two contrary views of emotions; on the one hand we regard them as merely hysterical impediments to clear thinking, and on the other as constitutive of a correct grasp of what is valuable.

Our language, I think, also reflects this ambivalence. In English the two words “Passion” and “Emotion”<sup>3</sup> are used almost interchangeably - or at any rate, there is no accepted account of a difference in meaning. But in certain contexts their meaning is *not* the same. To describe someone as “highly emotional” would generally be taken as indicating some kind of instability, and certainly would imply something negative- perhaps an inability to think straight, to work, or to “face facts”. To describe someone as “very passionate”, however, would not be taken as a critical or negative appraisal, but on the contrary, as saying something positive. It is reasonable to suspect that this confusion is the result of the fragmentary nature of our historical inheritance.

Putting Folk Psychology to one side now, the history of *philosophical* thinking about the emotions is in large part a sub-plot of the history of philosophical thinking about the mind. That is to say that individual philosophers have generally formed their views about the nature and value of emotions under pressure from their other philosophical commitments; either commitments to general theories of the mental or to even more

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<sup>3</sup> Both of which have classical roots; “Passion” coming from the Greek “pathe”, and “Emotion” which comes from the Latin “movere” meaning to move. This is a reflection of the “passivity” of emotional states.



general metaphysical and ethical views. Plato's view of what an emotional state is and his tri-partite conception of the soul - which in turn is part of a bigger metaphysical and epistemological picture- is an obvious instance of this. And what is true of Plato is also true of Descartes, Hume, Spinoza and, in more modern times, Ryle and many others.

In this thesis I shall not attempt a comprehensive survey of the views of different philosophers. Instead, my aim is to elucidate two questions; first, what *are* emotions, and second, are they valuable, and if so why? These questions are connected in a fairly obvious way, since the answer we give to the first question will constitute the background to any answer we offer to the second. If, for example, it turns out that an emotion is in general not unlike sensation, that fact will limit the kinds of reasons we might credibly offer for valuing it. In general, I do not think that we *do* think that an emotion is at bottom something comparable to a sensation- despite what our casual talk might imply- and relatedly, we think their importance is quite distinct to that of sensations.

Although popular attitudes do not always reflect these claims, they are - in the philosophical literature, at least- no longer seriously controversial. The tremendous growth in the philosophy of mind since the fifties, and the flourishing of virtue ethics in particular, have led to increasing interest in emotions, and consequently to a broad consensus on what account should, roughly speaking, be given of them. Nevertheless, there remains substantial disagreement about the details, as will emerge below. More generally, there are several more general philosophical issues which are raised by accounts of the emotions. One of these is that in the philosophy of mind ( and perhaps in philosophy generally) there tends to be a rooted bias in favour of one kind of mental state in particular- *belief*.

It is this favouritism which has retarded our understanding of the nature of emotional states, I claim, and led to a multiplication of subsidiary puzzles. In the remainder of this introduction I will sketch the outline of the argument to be developed later, and illustrate some of the other general claims I will be arguing for, and how they are connected to it.

## Summary of the Argument.

The position to be argued for in what follows involves several claims. The first and least controversial of these is that the popular conception of the relationship between reason and emotion is a mistake. It is not, for example, the case that only reason offers cognitive grasp of the world. Nor is it correct to claim that emotions are either irrational or non-rational. In contrast, I claim that emotions involve understanding and so offer cognitive grasp of features of the world. Secondly, they can be rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate.

These conclusions are in line with what most philosophers would now accept are the correct outlines of a theory of emotions. This consensus has been reached primarily through the rejection of the kind of account of emotions offered by Hume and Descartes. The most glaring deficiency of those theories was their failure to acknowledge the *intentionality* of emotions. Emotions are *about* things, they have *objects*, and once this is recognised, the gap between emotions and other cognitive states is narrowed and it becomes clearer why it is a mistake to refuse them entry to the club of potentially rational states.

However, to claim that emotions are cognitive states and can be rational, is not to say much, and it leaves many questions unanswered. One outstanding question concerns the nature of the cognitive element- is it, for example, a belief? This has certainly been the majority view, although there have been dissenters. In the argument to be developed, I will be siding with the dissenters. The significance of this question, is, as hinted above, wider than a concern merely with emotions. Other puzzles arise if we think of the cognitive element of an emotion as a belief. To take merely one of these; how should we account for emotional responses to fiction, where there *are* no beliefs of the relevant sort? This and other difficulties dissolve, I contend, once we recognise that there can be cognitive states other than beliefs. My second claim then is that the cognitive component of an emotion is not a belief. I try to say exactly what it *is* by exploring two other ideas found in the work of two very different philosophers; Wittgenstein's concept of "aspect-perception", and Aristotle's use of the concept of "*phantasia*".

There is, in addition, a more general issue connected to these, concerning the nature of rationality. In contemporary philosophy the dominant view is that when it comes to explaining behaviour, we should proceed by identifying appropriate beliefs and desires.



This belief/desire psychology would force us to regard many emotional states, such as responses to fictions and others as irrational. My third claim is that this is a mistake, and I try to show how we can grant these states a rational status. As a focus for these concerns, I have chosen at various points to consider the work of Donald Davidson. There are several reasons for this. First, Davidson's own theory of emotions serves (in chapter one) as an example of the kind of view I reject. Second, his account derives explicitly from his more general advocacy of the belief/desire view of psychology, which I also reject. The third reason is that implicit in his account is a picture of *understanding* which is directly at odds with the one I propose, with the help of the Wittgensteinian notion of aspect-perception.

Turning next to the question of the *value* of emotions, it would be natural- given the account just sketched- to defend their value as deriving from the fact that they involve *understanding*. However, at this point another problem arises. Whatever the cognitive component of an emotion is, is it not the case that we can have this cognitive state- and hence the understanding it affords- without having the full *emotional* state? This natural line of thought would make it harder to explain what kind of cognitive grasp of things was unique specifically to *emotions*. But as I indicated above, we are suspicious of emotional deficits, and the natural way to understand this suspicion is in terms of a cognitive failure of some sort. This has certainly been the suggestion of some recent philosophers<sup>4</sup>. Such a view therefore owes some explanation of how emotions and only emotions are related to understanding in the relevant ways.

This in turn raises a further general difficulty, familiar from philosophical discussions in ethics and aesthetics, namely the theory known as cognitivism. A "cognitive" theory of the emotions is generally taken to be one which takes emotions to have intentionality and contain a cognitive element. But this leaves it unclear exactly how the cognitive element and the emotion as a whole are related. In particular, is the cognitive element *sufficient* for producing the emotion? The view that it is, I label "strong" cognitivism about the emotions. This is distinct from two other positions, "weak" and "moderate" cognitivism. I argue that only "strong" cognitivism can fully deliver the sort of account of emotions that the aforementioned intuitions might lead us to expect. This is my fourth claim. My fifth claim is the tentative one that "strong" cognitivism is the correct view and can be defended.

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<sup>4</sup> Particularly Martha Nussbaum, for example in *The Fragility of Goodness* and *The Therapy of Desire*



There is another issue related to this, also concerning the value of the emotions. We can put this issue in the following way; do emotions have *intrinsic* value, or only *instrumental* value? For example, many psychologists<sup>5</sup> who favour cognitive views of the emotions argue that without emotions we cannot socialise adequately, and neurologists<sup>6</sup> are converging on the view that without emotions our general decision-making abilities are severely impaired. I do not disagree with these claims. However, if the value of emotions is only of this sort, then emotions can only be *instrumentally* valuable. In contrast, I try to show that in addition to instrumental value, emotions are also intrinsically valuable.

In the history of philosophy the most systematically developed account of the value of emotions is to be found in the ethical writings of Aristotle. I spend some time in chapter three elaborating this account; in particular the notions of character and integrity and of moral education embodied in Aristotle's moral psychology. Aristotle's account of the significance of emotion is ultimately in terms of its *ethical* value. Although there is great interest and appeal in this account, to the distinctively modern sensibilities of many, it leaves out something crucial.

Here, I believe, there is an effective contrast to be drawn between Aristotle's account and the views of Nietzsche. It will be enough to mention two aspects of this contrast here. Nietzsche, although he explicitly disavowed the Romantic movement, espouses views which are nevertheless unavoidably Romantic. In stark contrast to the traditions of antiquity, Nietzsche gives supreme value not to the sphere of the *ethical*, but to the *aesthetic* (Indeed, the distinction itself is a modern one). This is of a piece with his fulminations against the attempts of previous philosophers (among them Aristotle) to domesticate and render "healthy" our passions. Here, once again, I think, we encounter grounds for distinguishing between "emotions" and "passions". I pair these off as follows; "emotion" is what Aristotle is concerned with, I claim, in talking of the education of character, while "passion" is something slightly different, and is what concerns Nietzsche. This is my sixth claim.

So Nietzsche is anxious to insist that the value of passion is not concerned with the education of character in Aristotle's sense, but with the aesthetic value of life. That is the first point. The second is that he argues- in complete contradiction to Aristotle- that

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Daniel Goleman, whose recent best-seller *Emotional Intelligence* argues this point.

<sup>6</sup> Most notably, Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, and Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*.



the *education* of emotion is not only *not* desirable, but a complete disaster<sup>7</sup>. This raises the general question of education. Can emotions *be* educated? And if so, how? Secondly, should we take their education to be a good or a bad thing? Thirdly, if they can be educated, *what* is it that we educate? This question brings us back to previous issues; if the cognitive component of an emotion is a belief, then educating emotions will involve educating beliefs. But the sheer recalcitrance of emotional experience, its reluctance to *be* educated, may alone be enough to suggest that this is a misguided account. In any case, I think we can establish that the education of beliefs is not at all what is at stake, and this leaves a need for some account of what *is* involved.

There are additionally, a spectrum of ethical viewpoints which are generally hostile to any attribution of value- at least, *ethical* value- to emotions. The Kantian view is the most obvious one, although some recent writers have qualified this picture in some respects<sup>8</sup>. Another is Stoicism. Popular understanding of Stoicism is incomplete and in crucial respects misguided. While many of us would be happy to get rid of many of our own emotions and those of others - as the Stoics held was necessary for a fulfilled and virtuous life - few if any would get rid of them all. Yet this is precisely the Stoic aim. Isaiah Berlin claimed<sup>9</sup> that Stoicism was not so much a historically local philosophical theory but an instance of a more general attitude towards the world which has recurred at different times and in different cultures, and it is certainly possible to see important aspects of it replicated in Kantian thought and in Buddhism, for example. However, the dispute between the Stoics and Aristotle over the value of emotion rests on a specific dispute about human flourishing. In chapter four I argue that Aristotle gets the better of the argument.

There is also a disagreement between Aristotle and the Stoics over the *nature* of the emotional states. The Stoics hold a version of what I call “Strong “ cognitivism. The same is arguably true of Aristotle, I claim. But in another respect, however, their views are utterly different. The Stoics hold the view that an emotion *just is* a cognition. This- on the face of it, implausible- view has recently been defended<sup>10</sup> as a means of showing

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<sup>7</sup> Or at least much of what he says - some of it specifically about Aristotle- suggests this. But he is not in favour of unbridled emotion either, and thinks strength of character a virtue. These points are followed up in Ch.3.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*.

<sup>9</sup> In “Two Concepts of Liberty”, p.139.

<sup>10</sup> By Martha Nussbaum in *The Therapy of Desire*. See Chapter three.

how full understanding requires emotion. But it is an unnecessarily strong view, since “strong” cognitivism, I claim, can equally support these claims about understanding without any of the disadvantages that accrue to the Stoic view.

The final two chapters explore our emotional responses to fiction and the role of belief in psychological explanation. In the last chapter I try to pull together various themes from previous chapters, and in particular to develop the idea that *phantasia* are convincing or unconvincing, quite apart from whether they are assented to or believed in. This thesis offers an explanation of the conflict between emotion and judgement, and allows us to see a role for techniques of persuasion apart from the philosophical practice of dialectic. In particular, it offers a defence of *rhetoric*, which, since Plato, has been deemed to make no contribution to real understanding, which is the province of philosophy and the result of dialectic and the formation of true belief.

The nature of emotional states then, opens up wider questions about the nature of understanding, about what sorts of mental states there are, and the nature of rationality. The impetus behind the topic therefore, is not simply to say what emotions are and why we value them- although obviously, that is the immediate task in hand- but to attempt to weaken the stranglehold of the philosophical picture of cognition which I mentioned. Many of these aims are already to be found in the writings of Wittgenstein. But as I shall argue in the final chapter, many of the same errors attacked by Wittgenstein are still to be found in mainstream philosophy today.



# Chapter One. The Nature of Emotions.

## Feelings.

What is involved in being in an emotional state? When I am angry or frightened, for example, what does my fear or anger consist in? It seems an uncontroversial starting point to say that each state normally (though perhaps not always) involves (though it may not be exhaustively reduced to) certain feelings, of both a physical and non-physical nature. These bodily and non-bodily feelings then seem to be at least *associated* with emotions, whether or not they *are* emotions. Other candidates which also seem associated with emotional states might be physiological symptoms of various sorts, such as a racing pulse, sweating, and so on, thoughts of one sort or another, desires to do certain things, and behaviour of various kinds. In addition, there may be, (and certainly *must* be if any kind of “identity theory” is true) different physical states of the brain and nervous system which, whether we know it or not, are involved in emotional states. Given then that these are the most obvious features of emotional states, let us consider a concrete example.

When we are frightened, what happens? Well, we can usually observe in ourselves certain physiological effects, such as trembling, sweating, a queasy stomach, a faster pulse rate, adrenaline being released into the bloodstream, and so on. And it seems certain that, as scientists and psychologists tell us, much more is going on physiologically that we are not directly aware of- the blood rushes to the larger muscles (for example, in readiness for flight from danger), hormones are secreted, the limbic system is activated and a certain pattern of neuro-transmitter activity takes place. Now at least some of these bodily events register as physical feelings- the feeling of queasiness in the stomach, the feeling of an accelerated heartbeat, the feeling of weakness in the knees. So much then for the physical symptoms and feelings caused by them.

In addition to these physical events and the physical feelings of at least some of them, an emotion also seems to involve non-physical feelings. Taking the case of fear again, fear “feels” different to, say, joy, in a way that is not accounted for just by the way its physical symptoms feel. Principally, fear is unpleasant (in *most* cases, but perhaps not

all- a point to which I shall return) and involves a non-physical feeling of tension, stress, anxiety. These feelings are distinct from the physical feelings generated by the physiological symptoms of the emotional state, such as the queasy feeling in my stomach.

The concept of “feeling” is a notoriously treacherous one. Ryle<sup>11</sup>, for example, distinguishes seven different senses of it (the “Perceptual”-to feel the temperature of the water; the “Exploratory”-to feel for my keys in my pocket; the “Sensory”-to feel an itch; of “General condition”- to feel a non-localised feeling of depression or laziness; “Tentative judgement”- to feel there is something wrong with an argument; “Inclination”-to feel like doing something; the “Mock-perceptual”- the condemned man feels the noose round his neck though he is in his cell) and he acknowledges there may be more senses. The two senses of feelings described above- physical and non-physical- seem to correspond to Ryle’s “sensory” and “general condition” usages. The question we shall begin with then is this; is any of these three components of emotional states(two types of sensation and the physiological symptoms) either necessary or sufficient or both for the emotional state itself?

Taking first physiological states, it has seemed obvious to some writers that physiological symptoms and an awareness of them is both necessary *and* sufficient for the emotion; in short, *is* the emotion. Most famously this view was held by the psychologist William James and later by Carl Lange (The “James-Lange” view, as it is often referred to). In his well known essay “What is an emotion?”<sup>12</sup> James writes,

“My thesis, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur *is* the emotion.”

(James. P.13)

What this means in detail is that each emotion can be specified by detailing the visceral reactions, awareness of which *constitutes* the emotions. So, according to Lange, for example, the difference between anger and fear is that the former is associated with irregular breathing, secretion of large amounts of saliva and a swelling of the blood vessels, whereas the latter is typified by trembling, spasms of the limbs and dryness of the mouth. On this view then, an emotion *just is* certain typical physical events or

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<sup>11</sup> Ryle, “Feelings”, *Philosophical Quarterly* 1951.

<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in Solomon and Calhoun eds. *What is an Emotion?*



processes and the physical feelings they produce. Does this seem to be a plausible account of what an emotional state is? Before answering, let us consider the view that emotions are defined not by *physical* feelings but by *non-physical* feelings

In Hume's view, for example, a significant feature of the identity of an emotional state is the pleasure or pain associated with it. Pride, for example, is in his view a conjunction of the pleasure aroused by a particular object, person or action with the idea of the self. He says,

“ Thus pride is a pleasant sensation and humility a painful; and upon the removal of the pleasure and pain, there is in reality no pride nor humility. Of this our very feeling convinces us; and beyond our feeling, 'tis here in vain to reason or dispute.”

(Treatise 11, 1,5)

Hume, then, seems to be saying that whatever perceptions or ideas are the causal antecedents of the emotion, it is the quality of pleasure or pain thereby aroused that makes it the emotion that it is. For Hume, an emotion is a certain kind of non-physical feeling<sup>13</sup>, while for James it is a physical feeling. So, is an emotion just its physical or non-physical feelings, or perhaps some of these in conjunction with physiological events and processes? Consider physiological events and an awareness of them first. Is it the case, as the James-Lange theory claims, that emotional states are constituted by an awareness of such events? On reflection, it seems the answer must be “no”. In the cases of anger and fear, there are many symptoms in common- increased blood flow to large muscles, faster pulse, and so on. Let us suppose however, that there is one or more symptom which is typically associated with only that particular emotion- say dryness of mouth in the case of fear. Could this be what anger *is*?

There are two difficulties with such a view which seem to be fatal to it. First, it implies that knowing what emotional state I am in requires me to observe and note my physical symptoms, which in turn makes the process of identification an *inferential*, even inductive one. But this seems mistaken as an account of how I know what emotional state I am in. The reason is that when I am angry I typically, though perhaps

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<sup>13</sup> On Hume's account the pleasure caused by the things that make us proud is not defined by the object which causes it. Rather it is simply one term in a causal relation.

not always<sup>14</sup>, *know* that I am angry, and I do not need to consult my physiological symptoms to discover this. This is a point I will be returning to at various points. Second, experimental psychologists (most famously the studies by Cannon and by Schacter and Singer)<sup>15</sup> have designed experiments to test how well people can identify their emotions in this way. The evidence very strongly suggests that in the absence of a “focus” for their emotion, physical symptoms alone are insufficient for people to identify their emotional state. Lastly, I imagined above that there might be some one or other physical event or feeling which was obviously associated one kind of emotion. But that supposition also seems false, for the reason already suggested, that there is a pool of symptoms which many emotions share.

The James-Lange type of view is distinct from another view which also emphasises physiological factors. This view says that there is some distinctive physiological event or pattern of events-such as neurological events, or chemical events in the nervous system- which, *whether or not we are aware of it*, would serve to identify the emotional state. Whether or not this is in fact true, the view I have just been considering regards *awareness* of physiological events as the defining feature of emotional states. Straightforward reductionism is not concerned with awareness at all. On that view, unless I am a neurologist, I will probably have no idea which states of my brain would identify my emotion.

An extreme version of this view is eliminativism, which hopes to replace emotion-concepts and all the rest of our folk psychology with new concepts from the neural sciences. I shall not present arguments against these theories since they are views about mental phenomena *in general* and imply nothing particular about emotions. Nevertheless, it is a background assumption of the views I will endorse that such a radical reduction of the mental to the physical is not possible. Let us assume then - what we now have good reason to accept - that emotions cannot be identified and are not constituted simply by physiological events and an awareness of them. What then about the view that emotions are *non-physical* feelings?

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<sup>14</sup> There may be cases where we *do* infer the identity of an emotion, or *that* we are in a given emotional state from the evidence. The present point is merely that this is not typical, as it would have to be on the theory under consideration.

<sup>15</sup> Reproduced in Solomon and Calhoun eds. (op. cit.)



## Pain and Pleasure.

This view has some intuitive appeal- above all perhaps because of the fact that we talk about emotions as feelings (I “feel” angry, sad etc.). But what sort of things are these feelings and how do we identify them? I have noted already Hume’s claim that pain and pleasure are the feelings relevant to emotions, but what sort of feelings *are* pain and pleasure? Are they physical feelings like sensations, and could they be the means by which we identify our emotions? To see how we should answer these questions, consider sensations such as itches, burns and pains. In the case of physical pains, for example, I know immediately that *what* I am experiencing is pain (except perhaps when the pain “creeps up “ on me slowly, as headaches sometimes do)- frequently without knowing what is causing it. About the identity of some sensations then there is little doubt. But not all sensations are so clear cut- it may in some cases not be immediately clear whether a sensation is pleasant or not. Putting these atypical cases to one side however, I know when I’m in a lot of pain, and moreover I seem to know this without *observing* anything and without having to make any inferences. Is it then the case that emotions can be identified by reference to pains in this way?

Burns, cuts and grazes are all *physical* pains. If, as seems plausible, emotions are partly constituted by pains and pleasures, are they *physical* pains and pleasures? Clearly not. So can these non-physical feelings identify emotions? If we think of them as simply (non-physical) *sensations*, analogous to physical pains such as burns and grazes, except *non-physical*, we run into a problem. Consider how I identify my pains. I know my current experience is painful simply by experiencing it. But I may experience pain without knowing what is causing it. If someone sticks two pins into my finger, I may be unable to distinguish the pain from that caused by three pins. We may of course be able to offer a *guess* as to the cause of the pain; we may become adept at distinguishing the kinds of sensation brought about by different things- at distinguishing, for example, a dry-ice burn from a cigarette burn. But knowing this- knowing the *kind* of pain it is- is a question of becoming good at making inferences.

Is the “pain “ of grief like this? Do I *infer that* my pain is grief? We have already rejected this picture in the case of *physical* feelings, and we have seen no reason to think it will be more successful in the present case. So if pain and pleasure *are* what identifies

emotions they can't be analogous to sensations. What this means is that they must have intentionality. This is a point which has also been argued by Ryle<sup>16</sup>. The pleasure of going to the theatre is distinct from the pleasure of drinking beer, playing the violin, and so on. But in order to say *how* they are different, we have to say something about the *object* of the pleasure; what we are taking pleasure *in*.

Already we can see that we have advanced beyond the original notion of a non-physical *sensation* defining an emotion. Granting Hume's point that pain and pleasure play a crucial role in the identity of emotions, we can now see that with respect to those pains and pleasures, we will need to say something about their objects. And in fact this agrees with experience; the pain of grief is different from the pain of jealousy or shame, but to say how they are different will require us to say what the emotion is *about*. It may be then, and I think it is true that, the pleasure and pain of emotions are partly constitutive of them. But these pains are not mere sensations, and cannot be described without reference to their objects.

## **Terrible Joy and Pleasant Grief.**

There is also another way in which the nature of feelings such as pain and pleasure might begin to worry us if we emphasise the cognitive elements of emotions at their expense. If feelings, like physical feelings, were merely *incidental* components of emotions, the following possibility might seem to arise. It could happen that an emotion such as grief could involve the experience of quite *different* feelings. If the feelings of joy and grief were merely contingently associated with their emotions, the feelings could conceivably swap emotions, and joy would come to *feel* like grief feels, and vice versa<sup>17</sup>. If we emphasise the cognitive aspect as giving the identity of an emotion, the cognition will in these cases remain the same and consequently it will still be the same emotion.

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<sup>16</sup> Ryle, "Pleasure", in *Dilemmas*.

<sup>17</sup> This possibility is discussed by Stephen Leighton, "On Feeling Angry and Elated", *Journal of Philosophy* 1988.



Yet there seems to be something wrong with this possibility. We feel that the feelings of grief are somehow *appropriate* to the emotion, and likewise the feelings of joy. The imagined swap would combine a negative cognition (grief) with a positive feeling (joy). Perhaps the source of our misgivings about this possibility is that the positive feeling *itself* has intentionality. However this can only be part of the story. For one thing, there is the possible objection that all cognitions are affectless (see below). If this objection is right, the intentional element of pleasure and pain could be experienced without the affect. So we could have the negative intentional component of the feeling of grief without the negative affect.

But given the arguments of the previous section we might feel that we now have a good reply to this objection; namely that the negative or positive *affect* of pleasure and pain cannot really *be* separated from the intentional component. It might be possible to have the cognitive element without the affective component<sup>18</sup>, but when you *do* have both, they are inextricably intertwined. The badness of the feeling of grief *just is* the negative way things are conceived; the badness of the feeling is specific to *that* construal of the situation. This is what we argued above- the pleasure or pain is not simply a free-floating hedonic element. But although pleasure and pain are intentional states, we do not yet have an argument to show that the pain of grief and the pleasure of joy must involve *different* cognitive construals<sup>19</sup>. If they did, then the pleasant feeling of joy could not be “peeled-off“ and stuck together with the grief-cognition without the effect of double vision, since the experience would involve two distinct cognitive construals of the situation. But it may be that the cognitive elements of both grief and joy would *not* be incongruous, in which case the pleasure of joy could be grafted onto the cognitive element of grief without disparities showing up.

Suppose then that this occurs; we experience grief but it feels pleasant. Is there anything to fall back on which would enable us to claim that such a freakish case involves anything *inappropriate*, rather than being simply an aberration of nature? Well, is there not still the point that the feeling is a *good* one; it is pleasant, and this still involves an incongruity with the intentional component? This claim assumes however

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<sup>18</sup> As non-cognitivists claim; see below.

<sup>19</sup> That is to say; suppose two people are confronted with the news of somebody's death, and the first reacts with joy, the other with grief. Must there be a *cognitive* difference here in their construal of the facts? I am inclined to say there will be, but the non-cognitivist is likely to deny it. For the moment I leave it an open issue, but I return to this question below.



that the cognitive content is itself either positive or negative. But as we shall see in the next chapter, this is precisely the assumption which some popular, anti-cognitivist views about value - most famously Hume's - will deny. If we think of the cognitive components of grief and joy as being in themselves neutral, then there can be no incompatibility between them and the pleasures or pains in which they result. The question which remains, then, is whether, and how, the cognitive components of pain and pleasure can be positive or negative. I return to this issue in chapter two.

The upshot of the foregoing thought experiment, then, seems to be that we should not regard the hedonic component of an emotion as a merely incidental feature of it. Rather, the hedonic element is crucial to the nature of the state; what distinguishes grief from fear and pride from love is the kind of pleasure or pain taken in the emotions' objects. And as we have already seen, an adequate characterisation of this hedonic element will involve an account of its intentional content. This however leaves open the question of whether the cognitive component can in itself be positive or negative.

### **“ Psychic” Feelings and Affect.**

Perhaps though, in addition to pleasures and pains, there is some *other* non-physical component of emotional states? When someone is very hopeful about something for example, this may result in a pleasant feeling, as we have just seen. Additionally, they may feel excited. This too may be pleasant, but may not the excitement itself be a distinct and *non-* physical feeling? Let us assume for the moment that this is so. Do such feelings allow us to identify the emotions of which they are at least a part? Again, the answer seems to be “no”. First, such excitement is not *exclusive* to hope but is shared by joy, perhaps also by love. And secondly, even if such a non-physical feeling *were* unique to only one emotion, we would face the same problems we noted above concerning identification; how does such a feeling help us to know what emotional state I'm in? Here, we run into the problem of *inference* again, and this consequence is enough to discredit the present suggestion. We can sum up this part of the discussion then, by saying that we require an account of emotions which includes some description of what they are *about-* what their objects are.

There are further points, however, to be made with respect to non-physical feelings. One of these can be made by asking whether our emotional states are *always* accompanied by some non-physical feeling, however it is to be identified. We may be tempted to say “yes”; just as the “painful” feelings of grief are an essential part of grief, so the feeling of *excitement* is part of hope. To take another example, joy involves a “psychic feeling” of “buoyancy” or “lightness”, depression, feelings of being slow and “weighed down”<sup>20</sup>.

This kind of non-physical feeling is something *like* a sensation. But could such a feeling identify our emotional state for us? The answer however must once more be “no”, given what we have already said. In particular, we must ask if the “buoyancy” of a good mood is merely a *sensory* feature of the experience, akin to the sensory feeling of pain, or whether its full description makes essential reference to the cognitive element of the emotion<sup>21</sup>. If the former, it cannot identify the state for reasons we have already seen; and if the latter, it can only identify it -if at all- in conjunction with an account of the intentionality of the experience. So while these feelings may play an important constitutive role in emotional states, they alone could not *be* or *identify* emotional states.

But secondly, we might also wonder; are our emotions always *felt*? That is, do emotions *always* comprise such non-physical feelings? Justin Oakley suggests that there are cases where it might seem that they do not;

“I might be angry at you for arriving late at the cinema...but I might not have any feelings of anger, nor indeed any other feelings...because my attention is occupied with the film.”

(Oakley. P8)

Oakley also points out that we have emotions such as love and grief over long periods of time without necessarily *feeling* them during all that time. So, according to him, I can be in an emotional state without noticing it. Both Oakley and Michael Stocker<sup>22</sup> argue that

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<sup>20</sup> These claims about “psychic” feelings are made by Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions* (p.10), and Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*(p.28 ff). Stocker in particular argues for the irreducibility of such feelings to desire or cognitive content. See below.

<sup>21</sup> Philosophers who have offered accounts of feelings which view them as having intentional content, are Stephen Leighton, “On Feeling Angry and Elated”, *Journal of Philosophy* 1988, and Robert Kraut, “Feelings in Context”, *Journal of Philosophy* 1986. Also the papers by Geoffrey Madell and Aaron Ridley, “Emotion and Feeling”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume*, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit.



emotions involve irreducible psychic feelings. But surely then, we might say, the essence of such a feeling must be that it is *felt*? If, then, we *do* have unconscious emotions, or emotions we are unaware of, doesn't that mean that we *don't* have the relevant feelings in those cases? In short, then, the putative existence of emotions we are unaware of seems to refute the claim that emotions always embody such psychic feelings. How can there be unfelt *feelings*?

However there is a way out of this apparent difficulty. What is required is to make a distinction between *unfelt* feelings and *unnoticed* feelings. This is a distinction we are in fact familiar with in other areas. Most of us have had the experience of a "creeping" headache; at some point I notice I've *got* a headache, though I was unaware of it until that moment. Should we say the headache only begins to exist when I notice it? That sounds wrong. Headaches generally build up over time. What we should say is that I had the headache - and the feelings- but didn't *notice* them. In perception too, similar things occur. We may search in a drawer for something,<sup>23</sup> and only minutes later, having abandoned the search, realise that we *had* in fact seen the sought-for object there in the drawer. Here too, we can say that we saw the object, but did not *notice* it. And if there can be unfelt headaches, and unnoticed perceptions, why not unfelt emotions? This at least is how I imagine Stocker might argue for his point. In fact, he merely records his disagreement with those who claim that feelings must be felt;

"It is often held that part of the *esse* of affectivity is *percipi*; that feelings must be felt...I agree with the later Freud...I do not think we must be aware of the feelings we are having, or even that we must be aware of having them."<sup>24</sup>

We might still feel that what is left of these feelings if they are unfelt can only be their *effects*. That is, we might think that although I do not *feel* angry with you, nevertheless I may be in some state which will have effects of different sorts (be *affected* in different ways). It may affect the way I address you, the desires I have and the way I behave, and so on. The emotion I am unaware of, in short, *disposes* me in various ways. We might accept that, and still deny that there is anything occurrent such as a feeling, of which I am unaware. Stocker however denies this. He insists that the emotion is occurrent<sup>25</sup>. *Affect*, in Stocker's terms, cannot merely be described in terms of what an

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<sup>23</sup> The example is from M.G.F. Martin "Perception, Concepts and Memory". *Philosophical Review* 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Stocker (op. cit.) (p.21-22)

<sup>25</sup> The same claim is made by Oakley (Op.cit. p.12)



emotion leads to, but rather also refers to the occurrent state of affective *feeling*. And in fact, why should there *not* be unnoticed feelings? What is surprising in the idea, no doubt, is the idea that there can be states that are somehow *in consciousness*, but of which we are unaware. But once we separate the idea of noticing something, from being conscious of it, as in the perception example, this should seem less strange.

This is also an appropriate moment to mention the curious malady *alexithymia*<sup>26</sup>. This unfortunate affliction concerns patients who are unable to recognise that they are in an emotional state, or, if aware, are unable to identify which emotion they are feeling. Goleman describes one of psychiatrist Peter Sifneos' patients;

“One patient was so upset after seeing a movie about a woman with eight children who was dying of cancer that she cried herself to sleep. When her therapist suggested that perhaps she was upset because the movie reminded her of her own mother, who was dying of cancer, the woman sat motionless, bewildered and silent. When the therapist then asked her how she felt at that moment, she said she felt “awful”, but couldn't clarify her feelings beyond that. And, she added, from time to time, she found herself crying, but never knew exactly what she was crying about.”<sup>27</sup>

These patients, then, have emotions to which they are either totally oblivious, or which they are unable to identify. This provides some empirical support for Stocker's claim that the *esse* of feelings is not *percipi*. But these cases are independently puzzling. I have pointed out that we don't *infer* the identity of our emotions any more than we do our thoughts. Their content is open to the first person perspective. So is this first-person feature of the mental absent in these cases? How *could* someone have an emotion that they can't identify, if the picture I have been suggesting is correct? It would be like having a thought you can't identify.

In fact, of course, there is nothing entirely strange about this phenomenon. Most of us have had emotional experiences we can't completely specify or even specify very clearly- in “Proustian” moments of recollection, perhaps; or when listening to music. And to an extent this can occur with thoughts too; often we understand more than we

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<sup>26</sup> This disorder is discussed by Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence* p.50) and Stocker, (p.110).

<sup>27</sup> Goleman, (p.51). Goleman also draws on research showing that some eating disorders- for example those of many obese patients- are the result of an inability to distinguish and identify feelings. Unable to tell hunger from anger, Goleman claims, they react to all feelings as if to hunger. (p.248)



can articulate or make precise. So there is something familiar to us about the inability to identify emotions. But what about the total lack of awareness of them? This certainly is more puzzling, and should perhaps be put into the same class of oddities as blindsight.<sup>28</sup> The point which alexythemia helps to emphasise is that one aspect of emotional education which will be important is the ability to identify your own emotions.<sup>29</sup>

Returning to Stocker's argument; what it may be taken to show is that I can have unnoticed feelings and so also unnoticed emotions, not that I can have *emotions without feelings*.<sup>30</sup> So where does this leave us? The claim we started by considering was that psychic feelings could identify or be emotions. We saw above that this cannot be correct. Nevertheless, if Stocker is right about unnoticed feelings, there is some credibility in the claim that all emotions *involve* this kind of feeling. We will have to return to the subject of feelings again below, but for the moment it is sufficient to have disposed of one false picture of their nature and role.

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<sup>28</sup> One attempt to show how a theory of consciousness can account for phenomena such as blindsight is Colin McGinn's in *The Problem of Consciousness*, ch .4.

<sup>29</sup> I return to this issue in a later chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Unconscious emotions, if they exist, may be a different story. In these cases the emotion is *not* in consciousness, and perhaps it is less plausible that there are in these cases psychic feelings we are unaware of.

## Emotions and Dispositions.

What, then of dispositions? We noted above that emotions *dispose* us in various ways. Part of what an emotion is may be the various things it disposes me to do, to desire and to say. This seems right enough as far as it goes. What it is to be frightened, for example, is *in part* to be disposed to run away, to seek protection, to wish for a means of escape, to shout for help, and so on. But we need not in fact *do* all of these things- we may do none of them. A disposition can be outweighed by other considerations. But in any case, the natural thing to say about these dispositions is that we have them *because* of the way we feel. In stark contrast to this, Ryle - the philosopher most famously associated with dispositional analysis- said that emotions were *simply* dispositions<sup>31</sup>, by which he meant dispositions to behave in certain ways. Just as to describe someone as vain is not to say that he has experiences of vanity (vain people are unlikely to do that) so- argued Ryle- to attribute an emotional state to someone is not to say he has various sorts of experiences. Rather, like vanity, it is to say he is disposed to behave in certain ways.

It is a consequence of this way of thinking that when it comes to an awareness of my emotional states, another person is in just as privileged position as I am myself, for my emotion, not being any "inner" state, is as observable to him or her as to me- that is, through my behaviour. And, people being what they are, the observer will perhaps be more impartial than me. This is an unacceptable view, of course, and much has since been written on the failings of behavioural analysis. While there is no non-circular way to *define* emotions in terms of behaviour, it is nevertheless true that certain emotions *typically* dispose us to behave in certain ways. Emotion cannot be *reduced* to behaviour for the following reason; someone can be in a given emotional state without manifesting any behaviour whatsoever. Fear, for example normally disposes me to flee from the object of my fear, while love typically disposes us to be with the person we are in love with. But love and fear are not just behaviour of these sorts. There can be any number of reasons why someone might be in these states without behaving in the suggested ways. But the behaviourist cannot refer to these reasons without admitting intentional terms into the analysis. And in any case how is behaviour to be explained *without* reference to

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<sup>31</sup> Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (ch.4).



some mental item? Further, it is obvious that someone could behave *as if* he was afraid or in love and yet not be. So it seems behaviour is neither necessary nor sufficient for emotion. Yet, as noted, they do *typically* dispose me to behave in certain ways. And just as emotions dispose me to behave in certain ways they similarly usually dispose me to want certain things. There is then, a kind of presumption that someone who is, say, genuinely afraid, will be disposed in some of the ways mentioned above. If, for example, they make no attempt to escape the danger or call for help, then we will expect there to be some explanation for this. If we find there *are* no available factors which make sense of this failure, we may begin to doubt that the fear is genuine.

The reason behavioural reductions of emotions are unworkable is that, like the James-Lange theory, they ignore how things appear from the first person point of view. Working from the assumption that if psychology is to be “scientific” it must study what is observable and objective, these theories ignore the crucial aspect of emotional states. What identifies my emotional state is not that I am having certain physical and non-physical sensations, nor that they are brought about by certain events, but that the experience in some way *represents* the event or object that brought it about; the representation of the “object” of my emotion in large part *constitutes* my emotional state. The net result then of the foregoing is this; by elimination of the alternatives—different types of feelings, pleasure and pain, physiology and behavioural dispositions—we are brought to the “cognitive” model of emotional states, which offers what these other accounts did not.

Before leaving the issue of dispositions and behaviour, we should point out the sort of consideration that made theories emphasising them look credible. The Cartesian picture of emotional states, and mental states generally, was of something whose nature was exhaustively *inner*. The identity of emotional states was revealed upon introspection for precisely this reason. These Cartesian assumptions were also the ultimate downfall of other theories of the mental such as Husserl’s phenomenological project. Wittgenstein’s attack on this model of the mental consequently emphasised what was *outward*. In his famous Private Language Argument, Wittgenstein attempted to show that meaning is not an internal process, but something that requires external and observable criteria. In general, mental states do not always exhibit the inner life the Cartesian picture ascribes



to them<sup>32</sup>. However, it is a mistake to move from these legitimate objections to the Cartesian model to a wholesale rejection of “the mental”, and seek to analyse every mental term exhaustively in terms of observable behaviour. Instead, subsequent thinking about the emotions in particular has invoked Brentano’s thesis of the intentionality of the mental; that emotions take objects, and that to identify an emotion we must understand how the external object is represented.

## The Cognitive Model.

In the last section we saw the need for a theory of emotion to take account of the way things are *represented* to the subject, and we have previously noted that emotions have *objects*. In an emotional state, say fear, the object of my emotion is represented to me in a certain way- typically, as being frightening or dangerous. The *object* of the emotion is normally distinguished from its *cause*. To illustrate this distinction, consider the following two examples. First, I have a headache and am tense. In conversation with you I lose my temper over some minor disagreement. Second, I am worried by the fact that I have to go to the dentist tomorrow. Now, in the first example, the *object* of my anger- what I am angry *about*- is our disagreement, while the *cause* let us say, is my headache. In the second example, the object of my fear is my visit to the dentist tomorrow. But this cannot be the cause of my emotion, for how could a future event *cause* an event in the present? Instead, the cause of my fear might be my *thought* that I must go to the dentist. While the distinction between causes and objects is clear in many cases, it isn’t in all. But this is not an issue we need to pursue.

How does the object of an emotion fit in with all the other components? In the case of fear, for example, when I am confronted by some frightening object, say a lion, I undergo the physiological changes mentioned earlier- quickened pulse, adrenaline release, blood flow increases to large muscles, and so on. In addition I typically want to get away from the object of my fear, and this disposes me to behave in certain ways. Furthermore, there is an unpleasant sensation of tension. But all of these things come

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<sup>32</sup> To offer just one example, Wittgenstein’s example of what it is for a person to be *expecting* someone to arrive. Since the person may be engaged the whole time in *other* thoughts and activities, the state cannot consist in inner conscious goings- on.

about as a result of and are intelligible because of, the way I *perceive* my situation, and in particular the way I perceive the lion. But what is it about my perception of the lion that makes my emotion fear? The answer seems to be that I think the lion is dangerous or threatening. I am not afraid of things I know to be quite harmless or not a threat to me (this is not quite true, as we shall see) and in all cases of fear I do perceive the object of my emotion as threatening in this way.

Let us construct then a paradigm case of fear according to the cognitive theory which focuses on the *beliefs* involved in the emotion. When I am afraid of the lion there is a belief I have about it- that it is threatening or dangerous- (call this the "identificatory" belief, as it *identifies* the emotion<sup>33</sup>). Further, there are other beliefs I have about the lion, on the basis of which I have the "identificatory" belief; such as the belief that lions are powerful and aggressive animals, that they have sharp teeth and claws and so on. Call these beliefs "explanatory" beliefs, since their function is to *explain* the existence of the identificatory belief. On this view my emotion has at its core representations of the lion and those representations are beliefs. This is one account of the *intentionality* of emotions. This rudimentary version of the cognitive theory will shortly have to be refined, as it will turn out that there are different versions of it. We shall come to these shortly. First though, I must say a little about intentionality itself.

## Intentionality.

Intentionality is a feature of the subject's awareness of the object. This is a crucial feature of any explanation of an emotional state, since it will not in itself be sufficient for either an explanation or an identification of my emotion to say, for example, that I see I am confronted by a lion. For this would not explain how I *perceived* the lion or whether I saw the lion as a threat. If we then ask what it is *about* the lion that explains and identifies my emotional state, we seem to arrive at the two kinds of beliefs described above.

Another important feature about intentionality is its connection with *intensionality*. For example, if I'm angry at John for stealing my car, I may not be angry at John for stealing a twelve year old Ford, made in Detroit, even though they are the same thing.

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<sup>33</sup> I borrow this terminology from Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt* (ch.1).



The point was most famously made by Frege<sup>34</sup> in his discussion of sense and reference. The important point is that the object of an emotion is always presented under a certain aspect, and although two of these aspects may have the same referent, they do not both adequately capture the aspect under which I *recognise* it.

Another feature of intentional objects is that they need not exist. I may be angry at John's stealing my car even if it turns out he hasn't. This reinforces the previous point; it shows I cannot be angry at the (extensional) *fact* that John stole my car, since in this case, there is no such fact. So, imagine I am angry at John when he has not in fact stolen my car. What am I angry about? Not, as we have just said, the fact that he stole my car. But equally the object of my anger is not my *belief* that John stole my car. The object of my anger is "John's stealing my car", where this is an intentional object- in this case, a non-existent one<sup>35</sup>.

Is it true that *all* emotions have intentional objects? This assumption was one of the things that drove us from "feeling" views of emotions. That is, what was lacking in all the feeling accounts was any description of what the emotion was *about*. But what about states such as depression, or angst, or what about moods which seem to just descend and lack the focus of an intentional object? This does present an apparent difficulty, but not I think an insurmountable one. First, in many cases the difficulty may be a simple inability to identify accurately the true object of our emotion. This is not an infrequent occurrence. Many people for example misdirect their anger instead of focusing on its true object. Often this may be wilful, but equally often it is a failure of identification.

However, it must be admitted that this explanation will not work with cases such as depression. The cognitivist has to find something that someone who is depressed believes. And this belief will have to explain the emotion, or make it intelligible. But this seems to be precisely what is missing in cases of depression<sup>36</sup>. There is no one thing that is believed, and no one object that it is believed about. The cognitivist cannot

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<sup>34</sup> "On sense and Reference", in Moore, ed. *Meaning and Reference*.

<sup>35</sup> The problems surrounding the reference of non-existent intentional objects are considerable. However, since the issues are not central here, and generally approved strategies for dealing with them already exist, I have ignored them here. A brief survey of the issues is contained in the appendix to Ch. 1 of Gregory McCulloch's *Using Sartre*.

<sup>36</sup> An enlightening short account of his own long-term depression is given by the novelist William Styron in his book *Darkness Visible*.

ignore such cases by lumping them under the label “exceptional”, or “pathological”, because his claim is that it is the *essence* of emotions that they have beliefs. If this emotion lacks beliefs then the cognitive claim seems false. But is this the correct description of the phenomenon? Here is the novelist William Styron describing his own illness;

“While I was able to rise and function almost normally during the earlier part of the day, I began to sense the onset of the symptoms at mid-afternoon or a little later - gloom crowding in on me, a sense of gloom and alienation and, above all, stifling anxiety”.  
(p.12)

Later, he describes the occasion of a prize-giving at which he was the guest of honour;

“By the time we arrived at the museum, having dealt with heavy traffic, it was past four o’clock and my brain had begun to endure its familiar siege; panic and dislocation, and a sense that my thought processes were being engulfed by a toxic and unnameable tide that obliterated any enjoyable response to the living world....instead of the pleasure I should be having... I was feeling in my mind a sensation close to, but indescribably different from, actual pain”. (p.16)

Now it is clear from this that it is correct that the depression does not have a single object. But it also seems true that it is not what we would ordinarily call a single emotion; comprising a “sense of gloom”, “alienation”, “anxiety” and “panic”. Added to these, Styron experienced a general and almost total inhibition of pleasure and a peculiar sort of pain. However, the objection that seems to lie behind the use of the example of depression is that it shows the emotion is not directed at features of the world. This much is true; depression is not a response *to* features of the world, and in that sense it has no object. Nevertheless, the emotion has intentional content. That is to say, when in that state, the world is experienced as *being a certain way*. This is quite clear in what Styron writes;

“It was not really alarming at first, since the change was subtle, but I did notice that my surroundings took on a different tone at certain times: the shadows of nightfall seemed more sombre, my mornings were less buoyant, walks in the woods became less zestful....”(p.42)



To put it roughly, and in a way that anticipates what I will claim later, things *look* different to him. Granted, these differences can be elusive and are certainly difficult to describe, but they are real. Now I agree that this kind of case does pose a difficulty for the cognitive theory we have been considering: and that difficulty is that it does not seem at all likely that these (cognitive) differences are differences in *beliefs*. To this extent, the objection is a good one. As I shall argue below, what this and other objections like it show, is not that there is no cognitive content to these states, but that the content cannot be explained in terms of beliefs.

So the example of depression does not constitute a devastating objection. But it is not the only possible counter-example. Less dramatic examples of the same phenomenon are moods. Often we feel below par or grouchy, or, conversely in an inexplicably good mood, we get up on the “wrong side” of the bed, and so on. Again, we seem to lack definite objects for these states. But we should emphasise, firstly, that the fact that I cannot *identify* the object of my mood doesn't mean it hasn't got one. Often the true object of our anger, say, is *revealed* to us in a moment of discovery. Secondly, even if we grant that there is no definite object, still things *appear* to us in distinct ways, similar to the depression case. We experience the world, under a certain aspect. If I start the day having got out of bed on the wrong side, my mood will colour my responses to the situations I find myself in; a generous gesture, for example, may leave me cold; I cannot share someone's good spirits; small impediments become huge obstacles and so on.

To this extent, this kind of mood is a disposition; a disposition to see specific things in a generally negative light. But it is not merely that; it is an occurrent state also; it feels *like* something to be in these moods and not merely when the disposition is activated and focused on a *specific* object. Moods colour *all* our thoughts - or so it feels- but this global colouring amounts to intentional content. Furthermore, if the points above about feelings are correct, there *must* be intentional content to moods. If there wasn't, all that would remain would be physical and psychic (non-intentional) feelings. But on this basis our means of identifying our moods *could* only be via an inference. But we have a strong inclination, as already pointed out, to deny this. What Cartesian psychology gets right is that when I do know the content of my thoughts and emotions, I do so by different means to those I use for other things. *Cognitive* content, in other words, is connected to the first person perspective in a distinct way.

The cognitive theory then - or at least some version of it- can accommodate moods and objectless emotions such as depression. But the version of that theory we are considering at present arguably cannot. This is because the kind of content I have ascribed to these states does not plausibly look as if it can be analysed in terms of belief. Rather than turn to an alternative theory already, it will be profitable to see how much mileage we can get out of the present version. And it does seem to cover a reasonable range of emotional states; pride, for example, involves perceiving some object or action as being of value and as being appropriately related to me in some way; anger involves the belief that there has been some personal slight or injustice, or an injustice perpetrated upon some third party, and so on.

This kind of model of the emotions is not new. Hobbes for example defines fear as, “aversion with opinion of hurt from the object”<sup>37</sup> and Hume describes pride as a pleasant sensation in conjunction with the concept of self.<sup>38</sup> This model of emotional states has some major advantages over the previous models we have considered. First, it shows how we can identify our emotions without having to make inferences. Second, it offers some explanation of the other components of emotions such as desires, behaviour, pleasure and so on and gives an account of the relations between them. On this view, the belief is crucial, and the belief in conjunction with a desire produce pleasure or displeasure of a given kind. This is in turn accompanied by feelings and sensations, and the whole complex is the emotion.

But third, and perhaps most significantly, it shrinks the gulf between the popular conception of reason and emotion which I identified at the outset. This is because, if an emotion were simply a sensation or feeling, or feeling plus physiological events, this would seem to confirm the common conception that emotions are irrational or non-rational- how could you argue with a sensation? But if emotions are identified and in large part constituted by beliefs about their objects, then those beliefs like any others can be assessed for rationality, and so the popular conception( what Solomon calls “The Myth of the passions”<sup>39</sup>) is a mistake and emotions can be rational and irrational as much as anything else.

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<sup>37</sup> *Leviathan*.

<sup>38</sup> Although Hume’s theory would not count as a cognitivist one.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Solomon, *The Passions*.



This constitutes a great advance on previous accounts we have considered. There are however serious problems facing the cognitive model, and I argue below that it will have to be revised. Before doing that though, it is worth pointing out something important that the model seems to imply; namely, what it implies about *educating* the emotions. If I am proud of my daughter's first prize in the school race, this is, as we have seen, because I have certain beliefs; I believe she won the prize, I believe the prize to be of value and I believe her to be related to me in some appropriate way. It follows that if I should discover any of these beliefs to be false, my emotion will disappear. If it turns out that she didn't in fact win it or that everyone who ran got a first prize, then my emotion should cease. Of course, this is just what we would expect to happen in a range of cases, and it encourages the view that the emotions will be as open to contradiction by the facts and by argument, as the most "rational" belief. But while this is an accurate description of some cases, it fails, as we shall see, with others. The real reason for the failure, I shall argue is that the cognitive component of the emotion is not in fact a belief.

### **Recalcitrant Emotions.**

The first difficulty for the cognitive model arises in those cases where these expectations of optimum rationality are not fulfilled. There are many cases (for example, those discussed in Rorty 1980<sup>40</sup>) in which emotions are "recalcitrant"; when the belief upon which they are thought to rely is falsified or disavowed, but the emotion persists. This is not a feature peculiar to emotions- some of our beliefs may be recalcitrant also, although this may in turn be because they are rooted in recalcitrant emotions.

How big a problem is this? Is it not the case that if the belief is *genuinely* abandoned or disavowed then its persistence must be attributed to some rogue causal connection between the emotion and its object- it doesn't show that emotions aren't rational, in other words. In a way this reply misses the real difficulty, which is that if the emotion persists and if, as we have said, an emotion represents its object, and if, in addition, the

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<sup>40</sup> Amelie Rorty, "Explaining Emotion" in Rorty (ed.) *Explaining Emotion*.

belief-representation is disavowed, then the question is; what is the representation at the centre of the emotion? The reply we have just considered implies that it is still the same belief; it's simply that the person can't effectively give it up- the object keeps causing its resurgence. But this means that when he has the emotion he really *does* have the belief again. But this is what the examples seem to lead us to deny. Let's take a specific case.

In one of Rorty's examples a man resents and gets angry with his female boss, has a habit of depreciating her capabilities and speaking very critically of her. It seems he dislikes her or is angry with her about something. When confronted with this thought he denies it. Of course, he could be lying, but there is no reason to suppose this *must* be the case. Is there an alternative explanation? Could it be that only when in the grip of the emotions themselves does he have these beliefs, or perhaps that he harbours them, not even admitting them to himself? This last is of course a possibility-or perhaps he doesn't realise what he believes. Or again, perhaps his belief is unconscious? But *must* we assume this? It remains possible that he genuinely does not have *any* of the negative beliefs about his female boss, yet the emotions persist. There may well be unconscious processes at work, but why must we assume that what is unconscious is a belief?

To believe something is to think it is true. Which beliefs are the most plausible candidates for the ones repressed in this case? It would have to be the belief that his boss is a poor worker, has inferior capabilities or something of that sort, and this belief is unpleasant to him because it ill-fits with his conception of himself as tolerant, not spiteful, and so on. So, the belief is repressed. As just noted, the key thing about belief is that it is something that is thought to be true. What advantage is there to explaining these cases by concentrating on beliefs? To do so merely gives rise to the problem of explaining why the belief is disavowed. Rorty instead provides a similar kind of explanation in terms of what she calls "prepropositional but intentional habits of salience, organisation and interpretation".

Her own re-construction of the case begins with the supposition of recurrent reactions of this sort by the same person to various women in positions of power. This in itself makes it seem less likely that the belief is the straightforward one that his boss is incompetent, and suggests some deeper "habit of salience". Rorty suggests that there is some way the subject perceives or *represents* these women on the basis of past experiences, but that this is not at bottom a question of what the subject *believes* about women. If this is credible it suggests that we may need to cast a wider net than an



exclusive preoccupation with belief will allow us. The hurdle to be overcome is the natural tendency to assume that cognition and representation in mental states *must* mean beliefs. I shall argue that this is what must be abandoned, and I shall proceed by considering a range of difficulties for the “belief” model which will I hope support this contention.

## **Arational Actions.**

To continue then with the cognitive model, I will begin with a general point concerning the explanation of behaviour. The point is that much behaviour brought about by emotional states cannot be adequately explained by reference to the usual belief and desire psychology. Examples given by Rosalind Hursthouse<sup>41</sup> include; talking to the photograph of a loved one; destroying something belonging to someone you are angry with; jumping for joy; kicking furniture; covering your eyes in horror when they are already shut; hiding under the bedclothes in fear. Her claim is that there is no available belief and desire which we could attribute in these cases which will render the action “rational”;

“ If the explanatory desire in this case is the desire to scratch Joan’s face, then the appropriate belief has to be something absurd, such as the belief that the photo of Joan *is* Joan , or that scratching the photo will be causally efficacious in defacing its original.”(Hursthouse. P.60.)

What is it that people in such cases *believe*? To believe something is to think it is true, as we have already pointed out. But what do these people think is true which will explain their actions? There seems to be *no* coherent belief that can be attributed to them. Hursthouse’s conclusion is that such actions are arational rather than irrational, they are not done in the belief that the action will achieve any goal or on the basis of any belief that would make them rational. What do these cases show? If Hursthouse is correct in thinking that such *actions* are not rational it is nevertheless true that they are intelligible. Hursthouse’s argument is not immediately about emotions, but about the actions we perform under their influence. It would not itself show that emotion does not

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<sup>41</sup> Hursthouse, “Arational Actions”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1991. I return to Hursthouse’s argument in the final chapter, where I consider a more general diagnosis of the difficulties it raises.

involve, or is not identified by belief. Or at least, not directly. Instead it shows that much of what we do when in the grip of emotions is more bizarre than we take it to be. But it may also imply something about emotions themselves. I suggest later that at least some of these problematic actions are problematic precisely because it is not belief that explains them. The same problem that Hursthouse highlights here with emotional behaviour arises also with emotions themselves. If, as Hursthouse says, there is no belief to explain why I hide under the bedclothes or kick the table, it will soon become apparent that there are many emotional states which are not explained by any belief held by the subject; for example, cases of phobias and emotional responses to fiction.

## Phobias and Fictions.

Unlike a fear of a lion, phobias do not involve rational or even irrational beliefs. The man who is frightened of the lion believes it is dangerous or threatening, and he believes this because of other features of the lion. If, on the other hand, I have a phobia about spiders or small spaces, it is not that I - quite unreasonably- *believe* spiders to be a real danger (because, say, I think they are poisonous). That would merely be a false belief, which, when corrected, should mean I am no longer afraid of spiders. But phobias typically do not depend on belief in this way. Treatment for phobias may involve reassuring sufferers that their fears are groundless, but this will not ensure instant relief if phobias are not based on beliefs at all.

I may be terrified of spiders but when asked if I believe they are dangerous will answer "no". The problem for the cognitive theory stems from the fact that to believe something is to think it is true, and in the case of phobias there will probably be nothing I think true of spiders which will amount to thinking they are dangerous. Is a phobia then a purely causal connection? That is, if there are no beliefs involved, is the response just a reaction spiders bring about in me? The difficulty with this is that it suggests that my emotional state is no different to a physical sensation that might be caused in me by a chemical, say. Consequently, in line with arguments we have already looked at, I would have to infer the identity of my state. I would simply find myself shaking etc. whenever I saw a spider and no doubt I would soon grasp the link.



What has been left out is the *content* of the experience. My fear is directed onto the spider,; I am in no *doubt* about the object of my emotion. Furthermore, although there is nothing I *believe* to be threatening about the spider, I certainly experience it *as* frightening. There may even be features of the emotional object which are a focus for my fear, although even here there need be nothing I *believe* that would make fear rational. Similar difficulties arise in the case of emotional responses to fiction. Here the problem is that if I have an emotional reaction to reading say *Anna Karenina*<sup>42</sup>, what is it that I believe of her that grounds the emotion. If I feel pity, do I believe some great misfortune has befallen her? That would seem to be what the cognitive model requires, Yet, how could I *believe* any such thing since I know perfectly well that she is a fictional character and does not exist. No great misfortune has befallen *her* because *she* does not exist. As I know this, that cannot be what I believe. But what account can we give of my emotion then, if there is no belief to ground it?

Phobias and emotional responses to fiction then seem to provide two cases of kinds of emotional states which, like the emotional actions discussed by Hursthouse, lack a rational explanation in terms of belief. This kind of argument would show that in these cases belief is not *necessary* for the emotion, and therefore that since these cases are just as much emotions as any other, belief cannot be a necessary condition of emotion as such, although it might still be the case that it was necessary for *some* emotions. Now I will turn to another argument which is directed against the role of belief in emotional states.

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<sup>42</sup> The discussion of cases of this sort begins with Colin Radford's article "How can one feel pity for the Fate of Anna Karenina?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1976, and Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions", the *Journal of Philosophy* 1978. I discuss the problem of responses to fictions at greater length in later chapters.

## Propositional Attitudes.

Gabriele Taylor<sup>43</sup> has offered some criticisms of the account offered by Donald Davidson<sup>44</sup> of the structure of emotional states. Apart from the intrinsic merits of her criticisms, a brief discussion of her arguments will also allow me to introduce a theme which will be developed in later chapters- the conflict between two pictures of understanding, "Particularism" and "Universalism". This issue is of importance both for a correct account of emotions and more generally for a correct account of understanding generally.

Davidson argues that in order to be rational and intelligible emotions must, as has already been suggested, involve beliefs. But he also makes a stronger claim than this, that beliefs lead to emotional states much in the way premises lead to a conclusion in a syllogism. That is, given the premises, the agent is committed to the conclusion.

In detail; if, for example, I am proud of my new house, I must have *first*; the belief that this beautiful house is mine. This is the minor premise of the syllogism. *Second*, I must also have the belief that the owners of beautiful houses are in some way praiseworthy. This second belief is universal, and, in conjunction with the first premise, *entails* the belief that I am praiseworthy. It is this belief, according to Davidson, which expresses the emotion of pride. In this way, Davidson tries to show how emotions are rational in a strong sense- that they follow as a matter of deduction from other beliefs that the agent has. One final feature of Davidson's picture is worth mentioning; on his account, emotional states come about as a result of *inference*. This is of a piece with other aspects of Davidson's general philosophy of mind and language which I will return to in the final chapter. It is worth mentioning this now since the account of understanding to be given in what follows is explicitly opposed to such an account.

Taylor's main objection to Davidson's account is with the requirement of the universal premise. While she is sympathetic to the idea that emotions can be assessed for rationality, she denies both that they can be shown to be *entailed* by an agent's other beliefs, and that *universal* beliefs of the kind Davidson describes *can* be a requirement on emotional states. First, she makes the methodological point that the reason for

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt* ch.1.

<sup>44</sup> Various papers by Davidson mention emotions, but he deals with them at length in "Hume's Cognitive Theory of Pride" in *Essays on Actions and Events*.



postulating the existence of such universal beliefs is that they alone make the emotion intelligible- it is only intelligible that I think myself praiseworthy when we discover the universal belief that owners of beautiful houses are praiseworthy.

Taylor does not dispute the fact that we could always find a universal belief which is consistent with other beliefs an agent has, and with his emotions. But that by itself does not make the imputation of the belief to the agent necessary. For that, the belief actually has to have an explanatory role, such that without it the emotion is unintelligible. The universal belief, in short, must constitute a step in the reasoning.<sup>45</sup>

Taylor sets out to show that there are cases where such a universal cannot plausibly be said to play this kind of role. She chooses as an example a scene from Joyce's story "The Dead". The main character Gabriel is alone with his wife Gretta after a party at his Great Aunts', and she has just related to him the story of a boy from her past who was in love with her and who dies tragically. Joyce describes his reaction on hearing her reminiscences like this;

"Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a penny boy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians, and idealising on his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he has caught a glimpse of in the mirror." (Taylor. P.9).

What, Taylor asks, could be the relevant universal lying behind Gabriel's shame here? She considers various possibilities; the most comprehensive- taking into account the more salient details of Gabriel's comprehension of his situation- being; the belief that "When there is someone in one's wife's past who loved her; when he worked in the gas

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<sup>45</sup> That is to say; we might hold that the emotion was based on understanding of the situation- perhaps involving beliefs- without thinking that the agent must have in mind some universal proposition. So the only reason for ascribing such a thing would be that it constituted a step in his reasoning. What counts as being a step in the reasoning is ambiguous. It needn't be explicit, but it must be plausible to say that it played a role. If we can get by without it, the attribution is unnecessary. In addition, in Taylor's examples it starts to look unlikely that such a principle, even in a tacit form, does play a role.

works; when one's attempts at irony have failed, [as his had] when one has "orated to vulgarians", and so on....*then* ..one should be ashamed." But, in the first place, to be explanatory the belief has to have all the remaining details filled in. And this is no easy task. It's difficulty and length make the explanatory role of the universal doubtful. But even supposing we could complete all the details, would we be any further forward? "No", says Taylor, because this universal would be "entirely concocted from his particular beliefs about this situation." (p.11). In other words, we have no trouble explaining the emotion on the basis of *particular* beliefs that the agent has in this case. Davidson's case rested on the assumption that without the universal belief the emotion not only could not be justified but would be reduced to something which was *unintelligible*. But this is not the case. Explanation by particular belief need not deprive the emotion of rationality or intelligibility.

If Taylor's criticism of Davidson's are fair then it is a mistake to think that emotions are based on the kind of universal beliefs he claims, and it is also a mistake to claim that emotions are the result of an *inference* from such beliefs. These points are particularly obvious in cases such as love, or aesthetic emotions, for example those that might be aroused by music, say. In these cases, as no doubt in others, it is very difficult to imagine that universal beliefs are at the core of these emotional states.

Taylor's argument does not however offer any obvious reason for disputing an analysis of the cognitive element of an emotion in terms of beliefs *of some sort*. But this is exactly what we have already seen reason to doubt. If, as frequently happens, music arouses emotion, what exactly is it that I *believe* about the music? *Beliefs* such as that the music is sad or even beautiful, are inadequate. And even if we could make explicit some belief I have about the music, what is important is the way I *hear* the music, and any belief I do have is grounded in *that*. Only ignoring the fact that hearing the music has intentional content could make it plausible that the cognitive content of my experience *is* the belief. We may be able to extract a parallel point to this from Taylor's example of Gabriel. He does have particular beliefs about his situation, but it is plausible to suggest that these are grounded in his experience of the situation- that he experiences it as shameful- just as my beliefs about the music are grounded in my experience of it. This is the possibility I will eventually argue for below.



## Strong and Weak Cognitivism.

Earlier, I looked at cases of emotions- phobias and emotional responses to fiction- which imply that beliefs are not *necessary* for emotion in every case. Now it is time to consider another argument, this time to the effect that belief is not *sufficient* for an emotional state. The objection has many supporters. Justin Oakley for example, argues;

“An initial problem for cognitive accounts of emotion is that it does not always seem possible to distinguish between emotions solely in terms of the cognitions that they involve. For example, the cognition of another person in distress seems to be involved in compassion, but we may well have this cognition and feel *Schadenfreude* or malice instead. Similarly, we may construe a certain situation as dangerous with feelings of either fear or excitement. What seem to distinguish our emotions here are their feelings or affects rather than their cognitions.”(Oakley p.25)<sup>46</sup>

So, the objection is that two emotions, fear and excitement for example, cannot, contrary to the cognitive theory, be distinguished by the beliefs they embody because they are *both* “identified” by the belief that something is dangerous. Yet in one instance I feel fear, in another excitement. If the cognitive theorist can find no way of distinguishing between these states despite their similar belief-base, then he must concede that belief alone is insufficient for emotion, and that the emotion proper only comes about when the belief brings about the relevant affect, desires, feelings and so on, and it is some combination of these that confers identity upon the emotion. Not only is it the case that two emotions share the same belief-base, but it seems quite clear that someone could hold the beliefs relevant to a given emotion without having *any* emotion at all. A practised lion-tamer who was rather blase about the dangers of his trade might feel no fear, although he may be none the less aware that the lions are dangerous. So we can now set out three questions which we will need to answer about the cognitive theory of the emotions.

*First*; is a belief a necessary component of an emotion?

*Second*; is a belief, or complex of beliefs sufficient for an emotion?

*Third*; is it the belief component which identifies the emotion?

Oakley's objection, above, attempts to show that the answer to the second of these questions must be "no". The cases of phobias and recalcitrant emotions we have looked at suggest that the answer to the first question is also "no". Since a negative answer to the first question need not imply a negative answer to the second<sup>47</sup>, it seems as if it is the claim of necessity that is more important to the cognitivist. It is also important to distinguish the third question from the first two.

One claim we have met several times now is that it is the cognitive element in an emotion that identifies it. Without it, I have argued, we could only *infer* the identity of our emotion. But this claim is distinct from the claims of necessity and sufficiency. For example, it might be that beliefs, desires, dispositions and physiological symptoms are all individually necessary and jointly sufficient for an emotion, without the belief component being what conferred identity upon the state. The fact, if it is one, that a belief is necessary for an emotion is simply an ontological fact, no different in kind to the claim that a certain pattern of neurotransmitter activity is necessary. The claim that the belief *identifies* the emotion is an *epistemological* claim. It refers to the way we come to know about the identity of our emotional states. Oakley's objection seems to attack not merely the sufficiency claim but the identity-conferring claim also; he argues that having the mere belief that something is dangerous won't identify my emotional state- when I am in one- as either fear or excitement, and in addition, that I can have that belief without being in *any* emotional state.

If the insufficiency claim is true cognitivism will have to take account of the fact that factors other than belief must be present if I am to have an emotion. In short, what I shall call "*strong*" cognitivism (the claim that the belief *is* sufficient for producing an emotional state<sup>48</sup>) would be false. If the claim that belief is not necessary is true, it

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<sup>46</sup> Oakley's target in this passage is the account of emotional states offered by William Lyons in his book *Emotion*. Lyons' own account is given in terms of *evaluative* beliefs, which he argues distinguish emotions. I return to this issue below.

<sup>47</sup> Logically speaking, it remains possible that a feature of a given thing or state,

although not necessary for it, may be sufficient. It is not necessary to be in Liverpool for it to be true that you are in England, but it is certainly sufficient for it. Similarly a belief may not be necessary if a state is to be a case of fear, but in a given case, such a belief might logically be sufficient for its being fear.

<sup>48</sup> It is important to distinguish, when talking about sufficiency, between a belief's being sufficient for *constituting* an emotion, and its being sufficient for *bringing about* an emotion. Oakley's argument is to the effect that beliefs of the sort described are sufficient in neither sense. The Stoics, for instance, claimed that beliefs are sufficient in the first sense. It is important to distinguish the two senses since, as I shall argue in the next chapter, there is an additional objection, deriving from Hume, to the claim that beliefs



seems nothing will remain of the theory at all, since a *weaker* form of cognitivism would also be false. The weaker version would be that the belief is necessary for the emotion and identifies it. A third outcome might be the one mentioned above; that belief is necessary but not sufficient, and in addition belief is not responsible for the *identity* of an emotion. Perhaps this would be the result of a reductionist or eliminativist view of emotion.

So, having distinguished these three claims, what should we make of them? It seems obvious, as argued above, that the insufficiency claim *is* in fact true; beliefs are not sufficient for emotions. What about the claim that belief is not necessary? We have already looked at one argument for this claim based on phobias and emotional responses to fiction, and will shortly consider another. Each of these arguments I think creates a serious problem for the present version of cognitivism. Taken together, I think they should encourage us to abandon that theory.

What about the objection to the identity-conferring powers of beliefs? Cognitivists might respond to the objection that fear and excitement can't be distinguished in terms of beliefs about their objects, by insisting that some distinguishing beliefs *can* in fact be found when we look in sufficient detail. So, for example, though both fear and excitement seem to be based on a belief that something is dangerous, there is in fact the further difference that in the case of fear the danger is believed to be a *threat* while in the case of excitement it is believed to be a challenge. While this seems to give some grounds for distinguishing the two cases, there may be some doubt concerning *what* exactly now distinguishes them. What, for example, is the difference between believing something is dangerous and believing it is a threat? Aren't they both just similarly neutral beliefs that things of a certain sort (bad things, mostly) may occur?

In other words, the suggested response to the original objection attempts to smuggle *affective* connotations into the descriptions of the beliefs<sup>49</sup>; believing that something is a

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(and more generally, cognitions) are sufficient in the second sense. "Strong" cognitivism, as I intend it, is the view that beliefs (or cognitions) are sufficient for bringing about an emotional state, where such a state is taken to comprise other elements, such as desires, physiological symptoms, dispositions and so on.

<sup>49</sup> Some cognitivists such as William Lyons (*Emotion*) distinguish between two kinds of belief; "factual" and "evaluative". They claim that *evaluative* beliefs and not factual ones distinguish types of emotion. I would argue that such a claim is doubtful, for the sorts of reasons considered above. However, the point of greater interest for my purposes (see the following chapter) is whether the beliefs- whether or not they *identify* the emotions-are sufficient for producing them. It is at this point-as mentioned above (footnote 48)-that another objection arises. This is the Humean objection that such a belief is not, when properly understood, a cognitive state at all. That is because-according to this line of thought-it is not merely a *neutral* cognition, but one that motivates, and since no cognition alone motivates (it is claimed), there must be some non-cognitive element present. The Humean claim then-to return to the distinction made



threat is just believing it is a danger and not *liking* it, whereas believing it is a challenge is believing it is dangerous and *liking* it. Perhaps, though, believing it is a challenge *does* after all involve other beliefs - doesn't it for example involve the belief that something will be good for you, that it is valuable, or at least that you will enjoy it?

But while someone *may* have such beliefs, it seems, that at least in the first two cases they could feel excitement at the prospect of danger without them. What about the third example? This does seem a likely belief to have if danger excites you, but it is putting the cart before the horse to suggest that this belief is what makes your emotion one of excitement. You will only enjoy it *because* it excites you. We would surely not try to argue that fear is fear because of your belief that it will make you sick. Beliefs about how you will *react* to the object of your emotion, or to the emotion itself cannot serve as beliefs *about* the object of your emotion. Of course you may have any number of additional beliefs about the object of your emotion (for example, you may think the lion you are facing has a particularly fine mane) but what is required is a belief that will *identify* your emotional state. So the difference between excitement and fear can't be made out just in terms of beliefs. It seems then that the identity objection has some bite, although I will not suppose that it has been shown to be false.<sup>50</sup>

Whether or not the *insufficiency* claim is true- and I have said that it is- there is clearly reason to be worried by the claim that belief is not *necessary* to emotion. The reason is this; if an emotion which I experience does not require a belief, the question arises how I identify it as that emotion. We considered this objection before in connection with "feeling" theories of emotion; there, we saw that the other components of an emotion would allow only an *inference* from whatever feelings I have *to* an awareness of the identity of my emotion. But if beliefs are *not* necessary to emotions this would seem to imply that knowing your emotional state *is* an inferential matter after all, since there is nothing else it could be. However, we might respond to this argument by saying, conversely that *since* our knowledge of our emotional states, at least in a large number of cases, is *not* a matter of a process of inference, and since it is perhaps true (see

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above-is that the cognition alone is not sufficient for *producing* the emotion, rather than that it is not sufficient for identifying it.

<sup>50</sup> One way to supplement the account given so far would be by appealing to *pleasure*. So fear involves being *pained* at the thought of a danger. And the pain here is intentional, involving a characterisation of the danger. However this will not help the cognitivist account since pleasure cannot be analysed in terms of beliefs.



below) that belief is not necessary to emotional states, that some *other* kind of cognitive state *must* therefore be involved. This seems to me a strong point in favour of the involvement of cognitive states of *some* sort in emotions.

But what arguments *are* there for saying that beliefs are not at least necessary to emotional states? I have already looked at one restricted argument to this effect, since it only concerned certain emotional states (phobias etc.). Time now to look at a different argument which implies the same conclusion.

## Primitive Emotions.

Several philosophers<sup>51</sup> have argued against the *weak* cognitivist model on the grounds that it focuses exclusively on relatively sophisticated emotional states and ignores emotions at the other end of the spectrum, such as the emotional states of young children and animals and other “hardwired” reactions we all share. These philosophers object not merely to a lack of balance but claim the resulting theory is simply mistaken; it cannot be true that beliefs are either necessary for emotional states since the “primitive” emotions they offer as counter-examples do not involve beliefs at all.

Jenefer Robinson, in her article “Startle”, for example, proposes that we consider the human startle response as a model for human emotion, in contrast to more “cognitive” examples such as shame and jealousy. The startle response itself is,

“..an invariant response in humans to a sudden, intense stimulus, such as a loud noise like a revolver shot.”

(Robinson. P.54)

Robinson quotes the findings of the psychologists Landis and Hunt who studied the response, to the effect that it includes the following reactions; blinking of the eyes, forward head movement, contraction of the abdomen, bending of the knees, and so on. The response is found in all humans from infancy to old age and takes normally less than half a second for the response to be completed. It is involuntary and cannot be controlled or successfully imitated. Nor does it depend on the element of surprise. The reaction occurs even in cases where subjects fired the revolver themselves. There are additionally physiological changes of the sort familiar from previous discussions; alterations in blood pressure, reduced electrical resistance in the skin, checked then accelerated breathing, and so on.

This response, Robinson claims, belongs to the spectrum of emotions. She has two initial reasons for supposing this. First, the response apparently shares certain patterns of autonomic nervous system activity with clearly emotional states. Second, it seems to be a developmentally early form of fear. In reply to the objection that such a response is

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<sup>51</sup> Principally Jenefer Robinson, “Startle” *Journal of Philosophy* 1995, and John Deigh, “Cognitivism in the Theory of the Emotions”. *Ethics* 1994. Also John Morreall, “Fear Without Belief”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1993.



clearly not an emotion because it involves no cognitive element, Robinson cites the case of anger in children,

“..the earliest examples of rage occur when some ongoing activity is interrupted; later, the infant gets angry when some specific object is made unavailable; and later still when the cause of anger is not present, as when the infant gets angry at the absent mother..”

(p. 60)

The early examples of anger seem to be no less a reflex, although Robinson admits that “cognitive processing “ becomes more important in the later stages. Still, it is not *just* a reflex; it is unlike the knee-jerk reflex, for example, and the difference according to Robinson is that the knee-jerk reflex has no function. Developed anger and fear serve the same biological function as their immature forms, the young child's rage and the startle response; they ,

“ .. focus on some event in the (internal or external) environment, and register it as significant to its goals, wants or motives...the [startle] response “tells” the organism that the event is a significant event, something potentially dangerous which needs investigating further.”

(p. 65)

In Robinson's view, to be an emotion something must possess three features; first, it must be a bodily response. Second, the response must register something as salient to the organism, and thirdly what is registered as salient must be relevant to its well-being. This model she thinks can be successfully applied to all emotional states, whether it is anger at your government's foreign policy or compassion for Anna Karenina. Robinson acknowledges that by her criteria pain and hunger may also be emotional states, which she accepts may seem a counterintuitive consequence of her argument, and one which counts against it. However emotional states don't really form an easily definable class, and any suggestion as to what they essentially are will be fuzzy at the edges<sup>52</sup>. So perhaps we shouldn't take exception on those grounds alone. However, the first of Robinson's conditions is ambiguous between a felt and an unfelt bodily response. In view of the second condition, that it alerts the organism, we can

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<sup>52</sup> In the case of emotions not only is it true that, as with other “family resemblance” concepts, there would be no necessary and sufficient conditions, but in addition, unlike most of those cases, there are real uncertainties when it comes to our judgements regarding what is and what is not a member of that class. That we are unsure whether to call *puzzlement* (for instance) an emotion is not due simply to the fact that “emotion” may be a family resemblance concept.

suppose it must be felt. Yet we saw earlier, in our discussion of Oakley, that there is some reason to suppose that not all emotions need be felt. Many are unnoticed, or unconscious. But perhaps an emotion can have the function Robinson attributes to it *without* being felt. There is also the familiar Brain-in the-vat objection to the first condition. That is, we could imagine having emotional states even though I might be a brain in a vat, and so not have *any* bodily reactions at all. All that would be required is that I have experiences that feel *like* bodily experiences.

Before considering the implications of Robinson's claims for the cognitivist theory, it is important to insist that even in the cases of children's rage and animal fear, the situation is *represented* somehow in the child's or animal's experience, so there is *some* kind of cognitive content, however it is to be analysed. But is there *always* such intentional content? What about the "startle" response? John Morreall offers some examples which he thinks reveal cases which lack such intentional content. If I bite into an apple, he says,

"...and unknowingly start chewing a bitter tasting worm, I can spit out the mouthful in disgust without identifying the taste as taste of worm, or thinking what harm worm-eating might cause me. Indeed, I can spit out the worm in disgust without going through any mental representations at all."<sup>53</sup>

So disgust, he argues, need not involve any representation or intentional content. But is this correct? Certainly, Morreall is right that I don't need to identify the taste as that of "worm"; nor do I need to reflect on possible harms that might result from it. But is there nothing I experience the situation *as*? Is it not plausible that I must at least experience it as "a disgusting taste"? Morreall seems to roll two points into one; the first is, identifying "a specific object" of my emotion. On hearing a loud noise I do not, as he rightly says, need to identify the source ( have some specific representation of it) in order to be momentarily afraid. But the necessity of being aware of *something*, under *some* description appropriate to the emotion, is a quite separate point. And neither his arguments nor Robinson's effectively show that this more general sense of intentional content is not a necessary feature.

Robinson discusses another case in which someone has been involved in a car accident. Later, when driving, the car she is in skids slightly. If she reacts with fear, can we attribute any belief to her? Is it not, as Robinson claims, a kind of conditioned

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<sup>53</sup> Morreall (op.cit. p.361).



reflex? Admittedly, it does seem as if our bodies are capable of learning in this way<sup>54</sup>. But this in itself does not show there is no cognitive content in the subject's experience. Does she merely *find* herself with racing heartbeat and all the other symptoms but without any idea what has happened, as in the case of the startle reaction itself? This seems unlikely. When these experiences occur we have *some* understanding of what is going on, though of course it need not be expressed explicitly in any way. But this suggests that the situation *is* represented to her in some form.

Robinson claims that emotion points out to the organism something salient and relevant to its well-being so that action can be taken. But *how* does the organism know what is being pointed out, what is salient or what action is to be taken? This may not seem to be much of an objection if we are thinking about antelope, but it does present a problem in the case of many human emotions. The reason is the one we have now encountered on various occasions, that I do not typically identify my emotional state by a process of inference. However, if Robinson were right, this would be the only way I could know what my emotional state was. When I am angry or afraid I usually know what I'm angry about or afraid of- "That noise", "That taste", "that sudden movement". But this could only be possible thanks to the cognitive content of the emotion.

Robinson and Morreal face a choice. Either they can insist- unreasonably, as I have suggested- that these states involve no intentional content- in which case we seem to be left simply with a neuro-physiological process. It is then less clear than Robinson and Morreall make out that these *are* really cases of emotions<sup>55</sup> - or they can allow that they do contain the more general kind of intentional content described above.

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<sup>54</sup> Ledoux and Goleman (op.cit), for example provide much of the neurological detail of how neural pathways are conditioned by experience, and particularly- in ways that it is difficult to reverse- by *traumatic* experiences.

<sup>55</sup> Here Robinson falls back on the functional argument. But as I have suggested, this is itself contestable. Most of us in any case are familiar with states such as the mild anxiety caused by drinking too much coffee. Should we say this is an *emotion*? Certainly it is *similar* in some ways to fear; both share an accelerated pulse, an increased adrenaline flow, and heightened awareness. Perhaps there are also shared patterns of neuro-transmitter activity. But what is missing in the case of coffee-induced anxiety is any *cognitive* component. I may have no difficulty in identifying my symptoms as like those I experience when afraid - I may even say that I *feel* afraid- but there is nothing I am afraid *of*. Not only is there no *specific object* I am afraid of, but the world is not represented *as being* fearful. This is importantly unlike the case of depression, for example. Nor is the objection here simply that the anxiety is chemically induced. Delirium tremens is a more extreme state than coffee-induced anxiety, yet it too is chemically



However, the kind of considerations just offered in reply to Robinson and Morreall may not be enough to save the cognitive theorist. It remains doubtful whether in all cases the intentional content of these states must involve *beliefs*. Most obviously this is likely in the case of the emotions of animals and small children. The cognitivist must either deny that the startle response and the emotions of young children and animals do in fact *belong* to the class of emotions ( which seems both counterintuitive in at least some cases *and* stipulative) or he can accept that they *are* emotions, but insist that they fall into a different class. This would require providing a legitimate reason for saying these emotions belong to a sub-class and then restricting the cognitivist claim to the other, main class.

But what *could* justify saying that these emotions form a distinct group? And even assuming they do belong to a separate group, what difference would that make? It still means that some emotions don't require beliefs, and so weak cognitivism seems false. But is there any reason why we *should* say that these emotions fall into a separate group? It cannot be, as John Deigh argues, that they do not possess intentionality;

“The emotions of antelope, for instance, though neither rational nor irrational are not objectless states; bucks, when rutting, display anger towards their rivals ....the herd when under attack bolts in fear from its attacker. Similarly with babies delighted with new toys, frightened of large dogs...”

(Deigh p.848)

Deigh may be right about the intentionality of these emotions, and so the cognitivist must concede that beliefs are not essential to everything that could be classed as an emotion. Nevertheless, he can claim there is good reason for thinking of these belief-free states as falling into a distinct group. One consideration which might be offered in support of this claim is the different relationships between emotional states and consciousness in animals and humans. For example, are animals aware what their emotional states are? Most of us would say they are conscious of the *object* of their emotions, but are not reflectively aware of *having* those emotions. Presumably then,

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produced (*all* mental states must of course be chemically produced since they are all in *some* way states of the brain). However there are more grounds in the case of D.T.'s for allowing that emotional states are involved, since the world is experienced as frightening, even terrifying. A state which consisted purely of physiological symptoms should not, I conclude, be counted as an emotion. A similar view of such examples is taken by Nancy Sherman in *Making a Necessity of Virtue* p. 64.



they cannot *identify* their emotions in the way we can. But even if this point is granted<sup>56</sup>, wouldn't it show merely that belief in our case is necessary for *identifying* the emotion reflectively, but not necessary to the emotion itself? For example, I may have a pain in my leg as much as an antelope but I *know* that's what I have-perhaps the antelope does not possess that degree of self-awareness. Of course, the antelope *knows* it has a pain in the leg in the sense that it is conscious of the pain, but may be unable to *reflect* on the fact that it is experiencing a pain. And, it may be claimed, it is merely this ability to reflect on my mental states that requires beliefs.

But in many cases at least the belief does enter into the *constitution* of the emotion, and it is in virtue of that that we do know what we are angry or happy about. The question of exactly how the ability to apply concepts to experience affects the nature of that experience is controversial. Some writers claim that basic phenomenal experience is unconceptualised, while others have argued that there is no basic, "raw" phenomenal experience.

John McDowell takes the latter position, while Michael Tye<sup>57</sup> takes the former. Tye argues that phenomenal experience is unconceptualised since it is too "fine-grained" to be conceptual. In the case of colour perception, for example, he argues that there are many more shades of the colour red - which we can distinguish phenomenally - than there are concepts of redness ( Tye. p. 104 ). This is denied by McDowell;

"We do not need to say that we have what mere animals have, non-conceptual content, and we have something else as well, since we can conceptualise that content and they cannot. Instead we can say that we have what mere animals have, but we have it in a special form...Our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is taken up into the faculty of spontaneity, which is what distinguishes us from them."

(McDowell. P.64)

"Spontaneity" for McDowell is the ability to conceptualise. And his view is that an animal's perception of its environment is quite unlike our own, because unlike Tye, he does not think we share with animals an unconceptualised phenomenal input.

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<sup>56</sup> In the final chapter I consider the case of animal emotions and reflexive awareness in more detail, by focusing on Davidson's argument that animals are incapable of having beliefs and so, on his view, are incapable of having emotions.

<sup>57</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World*, and Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness*.

Since animals are without concepts, he claims, they can have no conception of the self or of existence through time, according to McDowell. Consequently they have no reflexive awareness and no sense of time. This recalls Wittgenstein's remark that we can imagine a dog wishing its master would return, but not wishing he would return next Wednesday<sup>58</sup>. For Tye, my pain and the animal's are the same in character, the only difference between us being that I can talk about mine in concepts.

McDowell's views are controversial and it would therefore be unwise for the cognitivist to rely on them for his defence against the arguments of Robinson and Deigh. Nevertheless, they do offer some grounds for thinking that a legitimate distinction can be made between the emotions of animals, say, and our own. A more general reply, however, would be the Wittgensteinian one that we should not look for necessary and sufficient conditions for membership of a class. All that can realistically be hoped for is an overlapping set of criteria *some* of which must be possessed for membership. This "family resemblance" view may be plausible, given that- as we have already had occasion to note- emotions do not seem to form an easily definable class, and many grey areas can be found. Nevertheless it will not help the cognitivist, who does want to defend the claim of necessity. However, against the Wittgensteinian and the cognitivist, I claim it remains plausible to maintain that emotions do *all* have intentional content, but that this content does not require beliefs.

The arguments of Robinson and Deigh therefore succeed in showing that there *are* some emotions which do not involve the kinds of beliefs we would expect if the cognitivist model were correct. And we have previously surveyed a number of other arguments which also seem to show that beliefs are not necessary for emotions (the existence of phobias; emotional responses to fiction). But these arguments do not affect the claim that emotions have cognitive content. As far as that claim goes, the arguments are, I think, decidedly in favour of it. So the question arises whether there might be cognitions which are not beliefs.

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<sup>58</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*.



## An Alternative Account of Cognition.

So far, then, I have been considering objections to the cognitivist view . Weak cognitivism as I have described it is the view that belief is *necessary* for an emotional state and gives the emotion its identity in virtue of the way it represents the object of the emotion. A stronger version of cognitivism might claim that belief is also *sufficient* for the emotion. I will consider this view presently .

At the moment let us consider an alternative to the belief theory. We have seen three problems it creates by focusing on belief. One is that belief is tied to truth, and perhaps not all cognitions are linked to truth in that way. A second reason is that it is propositional. But why should we suppose that all cognitive states are like that? A third reason, which we will now consider is that belief is too insubstantial a thing to be the basis of emotion. I will then set out an alternative view, claiming that what is required for emotion is not merely belief but a form of cognition more like *perception*.

I shall argue, along with Deigh, that the basic error of the cognitivist is to assume that since emotions possess intentionality they must be centered round beliefs.

Various philosophers<sup>59</sup> have suggested that emotional cognition is something like perception. I will begin by considering the views of Cheshire Calhoun, since her views on the inadequacy of beliefs mirror arguments offered in this and the third chapter.

Calhoun<sup>60</sup>, after considering some of the objections raised above- phobias, recalcitrant emotions and primitive emotions - concludes that the cognitivist must grant that some emotions are felt without the relevant beliefs. Her point in doing so, however, is not merely to segregate emotional states into two groups, as discussed above, but to question the concentration on belief as the only candidate for the cognitive element of emotion. Since if it is true that not all emotions involve beliefs, but it is also true that

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<sup>59</sup> For example, David Hamlyn, "The Phenomena of Love and Hate", and "Learning to Love", both in *Learning, Perception and The Self*; Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, Ch. 2.; Robert.C. Roberts, "What an Emotion is", *The Philosophical Review* 1988; John Morreal, "Fear Without Belief", *The Journal of Philosophy* 1993; Patricia Greenspan, "Reasons and Emotion"; Amelie Rorty (op.cit.) and Michael Stocker, "Emotional Thoughts", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1987.

<sup>60</sup> Calhoun, "Cognitive Emotions?" in Solomon and Calhoun (eds) *What is an Emotion?*

some kind of cognitive state is involved, what kind of state can it be? Take a case of recalcitrant emotion such as Amelie Rorty's case which I considered earlier. Calhoun offers the example of a subject who professes liberal beliefs about homosexuality, yet when a friend confesses to being a homosexual, she responds with feelings of shock and revulsion. It seems there is no clear reason why we should doubt her claim to believe that homosexuality is to be tolerated. How, then, would the belief-centred cognitive theory deal with this?

Does she then have - as the cognitivist would have to claim - a *conflicting* belief which produces the reaction of revulsion? It may be, Calhoun suggests, that she may have conflicting beliefs at different "levels". So for example, she may abstractly believe that homosexuality is not bad, but have problems when it comes to the detail of a homosexual lifestyle. The main difficulty with this description is that there may be no evidence for this contrary belief. The subject herself denies she *does* believe a homosexual lifestyle to *be* repellent. To insist then that there *must* be such a belief begs the question. But it is clear enough that something is going on in these cases- *something* is in conflict. A suggestion which seems natural is that there *is* some cognitive element which generates her revulsion, though it is not a belief, and it seems natural to talk in terms of her *perception* of things. The same thought would explain the other problem cases too. Phobias, for example, are a problem because the subjects do not think true what we would expect them to think true if their only cognition was a belief. If we suggest instead that they see the object of their emotion in a certain way this may solve the problem. The reason for this is that perception, as we shall see, is not tied, as belief is, to the truth of the representation. The fact that belief is tied to truth is one problem. Another is that in a sense it is too "thin" or too insubstantial to be the basis of emotion

Calhoun distinguishes two sorts of belief; "believing experientially", and "belief based on inference",

"Sometimes our beliefs are borne out by our own experience. I hold this belief: Main street is heavily trafficked. When I survey, from my front porch, the stream of traffic down Main street, this perceptual awareness bears out my belief.(The content of my belief is immediately experienced.) At such times, I hold my belief evidentially."(Calhoun p.336)

By contrast, someone could arrive at the same belief because I tell them the street is busy, and they trust me, or because they see from a map that it is a main street and infer it will be busy. Here, their belief is not borne out by and based in, experience. On the



other hand, some beliefs cannot be held evidentially, such as a belief in four dimensional space or a belief about prehistoric times. Some beliefs *can* be held evidentially but are only held by inference. A very young child may believe that something is wrong because its parents tell it so, but it lacks the experience of its wrongness. Take the case of colour experience. A blind man can arrive at the correct *beliefs* about the colour of the traffic lights (on the basis of sound, for example). But the reliability of this inference is compatible with his complete lack of colour experience. In a clear sense he has no understanding of colour. Here understanding requires a kind of *acquaintance* which cannot be analysed in terms of belief<sup>61</sup>. More generally, it is a feature of “beginners” in many activities that they begin with inferentially derived beliefs - on trust so to speak, by means of some rule or other *procedure* - and then as they gain the relevant experiences they abandon the rules, which they have by now discovered were only partially accurate anyway.

Calhoun’s suggestion is that emotion is not concerned with inferential beliefs. Such beliefs are simply too insubstantial to form the basis of an emotion. Instead what is relevant to emotion is seeing things in particular ways. These “perceptual” experiences may *give rise* to beliefs ( and perhaps typically will)- Calhoun’s “experiential” beliefs- but then again, they may not. In the example of the girl outraged by her friend’s homosexuality, she *sees* homosexuality *as* repellent, but she does not *believe* it is a bad thing. Although she sees things one way she does not feel that the way that experience represents those things is correct.

Such perceptions may be the product of upbringing, of particular experiences the subject has had, and so on. What this conception of emotion implies, is that a person’s emotional reactions- and his cognitive attitudes towards something generally- are a much more complicated affair than the belief-model suggests. Calhoun writes,

“In short, our cognitive life is not limited to clear, fully conceptualised, articulated beliefs. Instead, beliefs constitute only a small, illuminated portion of that life. The greater portion is rather a dark, cognitive set, an unarticulated framework for interpreting our world, which , if articulated, would be an enormous network of claims, not all of which would be accepted by the individual as his

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<sup>61</sup> On the argument that perceptual experiences cannot be analysed in terms of beliefs, see the final chapter.

beliefs.” (p. 338)

Calhoun mentions the notion of “seeing the world as...” but does not elaborate on what form this kind of experience takes. The idea of “seeing-as” derives from Wittgenstein, and in the next chapter I shall say more about the phenomenon and in particular, how it is linked to understanding and imagination. But Calhoun is not the only contemporary philosopher to argue that emotion involves perception rather than belief<sup>62</sup>. David Hamlyn, in a number of articles, explicitly refers to Wittgenstein’s notion of “seeing-as”, in particular in the course of a discussion of love. This is a topic I will return to later; we can reasonably claim, at the moment, however that love is a clear example of the deficiencies of the belief model, and one that shows, by contrast the advantages of the perceptual model. As Hamlyn argues, there are no necessary *beliefs* in the case of love<sup>63</sup>, as there might plausibly be in the case of fear or anger;

“..it is very difficult to think of any particular belief that the lover must have about the beloved, or any way in which the lover must see the beloved”

(Hamlyn p.277)

and more generally,

“How one sees things can be a function of one’s beliefs in a variety of ways; it may however be a function of other things, and it is certainly not that whenever one sees something as such-and-such one has ipso facto a belief to that effect... There is what has been called non-epistemic seeing in that way at least. The same applies to seeing mice as frightening. That may be a function of beliefs, but the seeing need not be believing .”

(Hamlyn. P. 272)

Nor, in the manner of Davidson’s model, could the major premise be set out, stating the qualities valued. How much more plausible to think of love instead as a “seeing-as” experience. Furthermore, the phenomenon of seeing-as would also help to explain why

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<sup>62</sup> See references to n. 54. Above.

<sup>63</sup> In stark opposition to Hamlyn, Gabriele Talyor argues that we can state necessary beliefs for love, in her article “Love”, *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society*, 1975. However, Taylor’s argument does not, I think, succeed.



emotions “seduce judgement”, in Aristotle’s phrase. Once I see things a certain way, it will not be enough to change my perception that I discover or come to *believe* certain relevant facts. Indeed, as is notoriously the case with love, emotions can blind us to the existence of these facts. Aristotle, in *De Somniis*<sup>64</sup> writes,

“...we are easily deceived about our perceptions when we are in emotional states...e.g. the coward in his fear, the lover in his love; so that even from a very feint resemblance the coward expects to see his enemy, and the lover his loved one, and the more one is under the influence of an emotion the less similarity is required to give these impressions.”

(460b1-16)

Aristotle here describes the way in which emotion can seduce judgement by creating certain expectations which in turn cause misperception or erroneous judgement. This is not a question of beliefs at all. Similarly of anger, Aristotle writes,

“ Anger seems to listen to argument to some extent, but to mishear it, as do servants who run out before they have heard the whole of what one says, and muddle the order, or as dogs bark if there is a knock on the door, before looking to see if it is a friend.”

(N.E. 1149a24-27)

So what the lover and the angry man get wrong is that they- literally - *perceive* wrongly. These points will be important when I later come to consider what might be involved in *educating* the emotions.

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Stephen Leighton, “Aristotle on Emotion” in Rorty and Nussbaum eds. *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*.

## Stoic Freshness.

The view of emotions being suggested here bears considerable similarity to some Stoic<sup>65</sup> views of emotional states. They too believed that emotions were cognitions, but as Michael Frede argues<sup>66</sup>, they did not think them ordinary beliefs, since that view is open to the - by now, familiar- objections. We can understand their view more clearly if we distinguish between a proposition and the *propositional content* of an experience. If I believe that tomorrow is your birthday then I believe a proposition. Similarly, when the blind man at the traffic lights believes that the light is green, he believes a proposition. The sighted person, however, *sees* the green light. He too will typically *believe* that the light is green, but apart from this belief, his visual experience also has propositional content.

Or consider another example; when we look at the Muller-Lyer illusion what we see are two parallel lines that appear to be of different lengths. But the lines are in fact the same length, and someone familiar with the illusion will know this. Consequently they will believe - correctly - that the lines are the same length. Nevertheless this will not prevent their visual experience having the quite different propositional content that the lines are different lengths.

The Stoic account of an emotion was that it involved assenting to the propositional content of an experience of this sort (a *phantasia*)<sup>67</sup> - to an "appearance". So it is not, for them, simply a question of accepting a proposition, but of accepting or assenting to the *way* in which a proposition presents itself to us. So it has a basis in experience, in the same way as Calhoun's account of experiential beliefs.

The Stoics themselves pointed out another feature of some emotional states which a belief model is ill-equipped to deal with. Julia Annas<sup>68</sup>, explaining the Stoic position,

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<sup>65</sup> Stoic views are discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Frede, "The Stoics Doctrine of the Affections of the Soul" In Schofield and Striker, *The Norms of Nature*. Frede's view is supported by other writers, among them Nussbaum, cf. "The Stoics and the Extirpation of the Passions" in *The Therapy of Desire*.

<sup>67</sup> *Phantasia* are discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*.



argues that a joke when first heard has a “freshness” which makes us laugh. Upon repeated hearing this freshness fades and we cease to find it funny. It no longer makes us laugh, but our *beliefs* about it may not have altered at all. In particular we still believe it is a funny joke. Something similar happens with grief. In time the pain of loss becomes less constant and intense. Whatever beliefs are relevant seem not to alter however. This seems to confirm the existence of perceptual cognitions in emotional states. Our perception of the objects of our emotions has subtly altered. The phenomenon is in fact widespread, and is not confined to emotions, as I shall later argue; much aesthetic experience for example, involves shifts of this sort.

It should be clear now how this different view deals with some of the problems we have looked at. For example, the problem with phobias and responses to fiction was that they could not be seen in terms of belief because nothing was thought to be relevantly true about the objects of the emotions. Now we can describe the emotions as *seeing* something *as* frightening, or, *seeing* the fate of Anna Karenina *as* sad, without being committed to the truth of the relevant beliefs. Similarly, the loved one is *seen* in a certain way. This also coheres with what we found earlier in the case of depression. In a state of depression things seem bleak, they *look* different. So while the depressed person may have no particular *beliefs*, he may *see* things differently. Of course, some account is owed of the nature of this “seeing”, and I will try to provide it in the next chapter.

## More Problems.

I hope then to have made plausible an alternative to the belief model of emotional states which is both intuitively plausible and copes with what were serious problems for the other view. But we are not out of the woods yet. Several questions remain unanswered. First, even if such “seeing -as” experiences are a feature of some emotional states, is it credible to think that they are present in *all* emotions? Second, I noted above that one of the attractions of the belief model was that it promised to bring emotions into the arena of rational criticism. This is because belief is rational or irrational. If, instead of belief, emotions are based upon perceptions which are not tied to truth, doesn't that mean that the common-sense conception of emotion as powerfully irrational with which I began, is after all correct? Third, and most serious; if what I have suggested is accepted, surely all that has been shown is that a type of cognitive state, quite different from belief, is involved in emotion. It has not been shown, above all, that such states are *sufficient* for emotion. And so, even if correct the present account will have to recognise the importance of the other components, and in particular of desires or interests or something similar.

The third objection is a serious one and I postpone consideration of it for the moment. The other two objections seem to me less serious. The first suggests that there may only be a limited range of emotional states to which seeing-as experiences apply. Do being frightened when standing at the edge of a precipice, or being startled by a loud noise, or being jealous of someone, or losing your temper because of a headache, all involve seeing-as experiences? I think it is plausible that they do. Resistance to this claim is I think rooted in two assumptions we might be tempted to make, which are both false. The first is our common-sense idea of “perception”; we generally suppose that what can be seen are features such as line, shape and colour. Anything apart from this we are inclined to think of as *interpretation of* what is seen. So alteration in a wide variety of more subtle features, such as the intentional features of the objects of emotions, are not something that can correctly be said to be *seen* at all<sup>69</sup>. But as I shall argue in the next chapter, this account is wrong. Once such an account is rejected, it ceases to be

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<sup>69</sup> These remarks merely sketch the kind of argument offered by Wittgenstein in criticism of the empiricist account of perception. I consider it in detail in the next chapter.



ridiculous to claim that the person who is afraid of the precipice and the person who is not, do not “see” things the same. The second source of resistance may be our assumptions about cognitions; that if there is a cognitive difference it must be a difference in belief. I think that in view of the difficulties such a view faces- like the ones we have already reviewed- we already have ample warrant to reject it.

When at the edge of the precipice, why should it be implausible to suggest that I perceive my situation, and in particular the height, in a particular way, and that *this* provokes my fear? If it makes sense to say that my fear of spiders is a result of the way I perceive them, why not in this case? Some cases may, perhaps, seem unlikely; when I am startled, is there any way I perceive things along the same lines? I have already argued not only that there is, but that there must be. As far as the question of whether animals could experience seeing-as experiences goes, I can think of no reason to presume they can't. In the final chapter I will return to this possibility in more detail.

The second objection (above) asks whether we have not abandoned emotions to irrationality. The answer here is that if beliefs and perceptual experiences keep in step then emotions can still be rational. For example if Calhoun's subject had not responded with revulsion but had reacted in a more liberal and understanding manner, this may have been more in line with her beliefs. Her emotion is appropriate and rationally defensible. If my experiences are educated and kept in line with my beliefs, the result is rational emotions. Where these experiences are not like this, but are in conflict with my beliefs, and have a different kind of origin- for example the cases of phobias- here the way I experience it is arational rather than irrational. If I lose my temper with you because of my headache, and regret it, then my reaction was not rational. In short, allowing that emotions are not primarily constituted by beliefs need not mean that emotions cannot be educated in line with normative considerations we value; what is right, appropriate, fitting, and so on. Two of the three objections then fail. It is time now to consider the third of these, which brings us back to the issue of “strong” cognitivism.

## Strong Cognitivism.

The third objection above is that the seeing-as experiences will not alone be sufficient to produce an emotional response. Those experiences will somehow have to be related to the subject's interests or desires. Cognitions- of *whatever* sort, whether beliefs or not- will not be enough for an emotion. It has not been sufficiently remarked upon, to my knowledge<sup>70</sup>, that the objection here precisely parallels non-cognitivist objections in ethics and aesthetics.

The non-cognitivist camp in both aesthetics and ethics draws inspiration from Hume's *Treatise*, and his *Essay on Taste*. The arguments against cognitivism there have a direct bearing on the case of emotions. We can see this if we return for a moment to the example from Julia Annas I quoted above. Clarifying the Stoic account, she claimed that the "freshness" of a joke was what was initially *seen* in the joke, apart from belief. As the joke ceases to be funny- through repeated hearing- it is not our beliefs about it which change, but the freshness which fades.

But there is an ambiguity in how we should understand this, and on one interpretation this claim involves making a tacit and hotly disputed assumption. One way to interpret Annas is that when the freshness fades, and my cognitive state is altered, this fact alone is sufficient to produce an effect on me, namely that I stop laughing at the joke. On this view, finding the joke funny - and conversely, ceasing to find it funny- are cognitive states. This involves the assumption that the way something strikes me cognitively, whether in the form of a belief or in the propositional content of an experience, it will be sufficient to *affect* me<sup>71</sup>. This will be denied by Humeans who will insist that any cognitive state only motivates or produces an affect in conjunction with a desire or disposition<sup>72</sup>. Consequently, finding something funny, for example, cannot be just a

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<sup>70</sup> One of the few philosophers to do so is Michael Stocker, in *Valuing Emotions*. Ch.1

<sup>71</sup> The same problem arises with respect to Frank Sibley's arguments about aesthetic experience (In "Aesthetic Concepts". *Philosophical Review* 1954.). Sibley argues that aesthetic understanding is not reducible to beliefs. It is not sufficient to believe that a piece by Mozart is beautiful, you have to *hear* it. But what the non-cognitivist will deny is that the "beauty" of the piece is something that can be heard. All that can be heard are neutral, inert features of the music- sounds. Only when these inert perceptions are combined with an already existent desire or disposition is the result anything that can be called "beauty".

<sup>72</sup> See next chapter.



matter of being in the right cognitive state. An alternative, and weaker, interpretation of Annas would be that the freshness of the cognition is *necessary* but not sufficient for finding the joke funny. However, given the Stoic view of emotion as being entirely cognitive, the stronger interpretation is more likely.

Some philosophers who prefer a cognitivist theory of emotions do so at least in part because it supports a cognitivist account of values. Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues that emotional failures, where we do not have the appropriate emotional response, show a failure to “see” things correctly, and that such cognitive failure is also an *ethical failure*<sup>73</sup>. These issues will be addressed in the next chapter.

A further point which I have not emphasised so far arises here; the question of affect. Isn't it one of the key features of emotional states that they *affect* us, and often quite strongly? How could this fact be captured by any account which says emotion *is* a cognitive experience like a perception?<sup>74</sup> However, while the Stoics do claim that emotions *are* cognitions, strong cognitivism merely says that cognitions are sufficient for emotions but allows that emotions comprise other elements. The possibility of strong cognitivism about emotions stands or falls with cognitivism about value generally, so this is the issue I will look at briefly in the next chapter. I will not attempt to settle this difficult issue, but merely to set out what is involved in it and offer some reasons why we should not reject the idea, and some tentative reasons in favour of it.

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<sup>73</sup> See next chapter.

<sup>74</sup> This is a point Stocker emphasises in *Valuing Emotions*, 1.4. see below.

## Chapter Two

### Humean Emotions?

At the end of the previous chapter we distinguished two general positions regarding the relation between cognition and emotion. The first, to which I gave the label "*weak* cognitivism", claims that cognitions are necessary for an emotion<sup>1</sup>. According to this view, without, say, the thought that he has been slighted, a person cannot be said to be angry; without the thought that something is dangerous or threatening, he is not afraid. According to this view then, is it the cognitive element which also confers the *identity* of an emotion? The answer to this question is unclear. We saw in the previous chapter that two people *could* have the same thought - for example, that something is dangerous - but be in different emotional states; one viewing the situation with excited anticipation, the other with fear.

What makes the difference we might say, is that one finds this thought pleasant while the other finds it unpleasant. As also argued in chapter one, it *may* be that the cognitive elements of the pleasure and displeasure are identical. In short then, the difference is not a cognitive one, and the identity of the state is conferred by the cognitive element *plus* either pleasure or displeasure. This is still a form of cognitivism since the cognitive element is necessary for the emotion.

However a different view is also compatible with weak cognitivism. This would be the view that the cognitive elements of fear and excited anticipation are distinct. So, on this view, both people may have the *belief* that the situation is dangerous, but over and above this common cognitive element, they may *perceive* the situation differently; for example, different features of the situation may become *salient* in each case, and it may therefore assume a

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<sup>1</sup> I assume henceforth, in discussing both forms of cognitivism, that "cognition" refers to some kind of state other than belief. That is, I assume that the original form of cognitivism considered at the beginning of chapter one has been discredited.



different aspect<sup>2</sup>. According to this view, since the cognitive element is distinctive in each case, it is also *that* element which confers identity upon the emotion. Deciding between these two versions of weak cognitivism will depend on the view taken of cognition and what kind of content it can have. The arguments to be offered below will- if successful- by implication support the identity-conferring version of weak cognitivism. However the really controversial issue is not this one. The issue with which I will be concerned in this chapter concerns the difference between the weak form of cognitivism and its stronger rival.

Weak cognitivism in both of the versions we have considered allows for the following picture; somebody could have all the cognitions relevant to a given emotional state and yet fail to have the emotion. This may not seem too worrying a consequence; indeed it might seem a natural one to be welcomed. But this conclusion would be a mistake, I think, and I attempt to show why below. The central difficulty weak cognitivism makes inevitable is that of showing how it could be that emotional states provide any kind of understanding that could not be provided by other sorts of states. Or, put slightly differently, how could it be that someone who was affectless, who did not respond emotionally, was *cognitively* deficient in some way? I suggested at the beginning of chapter one that we do indeed have this intuition, and I will attempt to support this claim below. But the central difficulty is that such an intuition requires us to show how there is a form of cognition which is available *only* through emotional experience.

Weak cognitivism fails to do this, and it is obvious why. If the cognitive element of an emotion is quite separable from the emotion itself and insufficient for producing it, then any understanding afforded by the emotional state is afforded also by the cognitive element *alone*, when unaccompanied by the resulting emotional complex. Since the difficulty here

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<sup>2</sup> In the terminology of those such as John McDowell and Jonathan Dancy, who favour this view, the situation takes on a different "shape" in each case. These views will be discussed further below. Cf McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" in R. Crisp (ed), *Virtue Ethics*, and Dancy, *Moral Reasons*.

results from the separability of the cognitive element from the emotion and its productive insufficiency, one way to try to get round the problem would be to bind the cognitive element more closely to the emotional state. This would involve claiming that the relevant cognitive element is only available *through or as part of* the emotional state. This is the view that I will call “*strong cognitivism*”. It goes beyond weak cognitivism in claiming that the cognitive element of the emotion is not merely necessary for the emotion it is *sufficient* for it also. Before continuing, then, we can set out the two positions, weak and strong cognitivism, as follows;

### *Weak Cognitivism*

- a) Cognitive element and affect are causally related.
- b) Cognitive element and affect are conceptually/ logically distinct.
- c) Whether the cognitive element produces affect relies on the existence of a disposition as an additional causal factor. Cognition alone cannot *produce* this disposition.

### *Strong Cognitivism.*

- a) Cognitive element and affect are causally related .
- b) Cognitive element and affect are conceptually/ logically distinct
- c) Cognitive element is sufficient for production of affect.

In summary, both forms share the same first two claims, which are obviously related. If the cognitive element and the affect are causally related then clearly they are logically distinct. Where the two theories differ is over their respective third claims. Because strong cognitivism says that the cognitive element is sufficient to produce the affect, then in a case of the affectless



person, although a cognitive element is present, it is not the *right* cognitive element. Consequently, such a person is cognitively deficient<sup>3</sup>.

In what follows I attempt to do two things. First of all, I aim to show that the disagreement between weak and strong forms of cognitivism about emotions is in fact a local variant of the more general issue of cognitivism as it has been discussed in relation with ethical and aesthetic value. The title of this chapter is not then primarily a reference to Hume's theory of the emotions, but to the general Humean conception of psychology which lies behind all forms of non-cognitivism about value. If that conception of psychology is correct, then all forms of cognitivism<sup>4</sup> are mistaken, including strong cognitivism about the emotions.

My second aim then is to provide some reason for thinking that the Humean conception may *not* be correct. I do not claim to *refute* that conception, nor do I claim to settle a variety of other important<sup>5</sup> questions which will arise along the way. My aim is merely to show that strong cognitivism is a plausible view, and that our intuitions about emotions cannot be satisfied by weak cognitivism alone.

I begin then by trying to show that we do in fact think that emotions offer a kind of understanding not available outwith those states. Second I set out the problem of cognitivism with respect to value, what Michael Smith calls "The

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, he is cognitively different. Further argument would be required to show that this difference was a deficiency. Arguments of this sort are considered below.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously *weak* cognitivism about emotions would not be affected, but this kind of theory is not really the kind of view that would be classed as "cognitivist" along with cognitive theories of value. Cognitivism about value means something analogous to "strong" cognitivism as I have defined it.

<sup>5</sup> For example, between different cognitivist positions there is disagreement about the nature of moral facts. Some cognitivists claim that values are a distinct kind of fact, that they are *sui generis*. This kind of realism about a distinct *kind* of property is not shared by those cognitivists who claim that the facts in question are *natural* facts, with "resultant" or even "supervenient" properties on top. Those like Dancy, (op. cit) think the latter position does not collapse into a version of the former. I do not attempt to resolve this issue, but some points relevant to it are made below.

Moral Problem".<sup>6</sup> I then try to show that these two issues are connected. Fourth, I consider some responses which other philosophers have made to this question, and lastly I try to relate the discussion to two wider issues which will figure in later chapters; the nature of *rationality*, and of *understanding*.

## What's wrong with Mr. Spock?

What in fact do we think about those who are immune to emotion?

Psychopaths, as noted earlier, are an extreme case and a worrying one, for the psychopath is not merely unable to sympathise and empathise and so unable to share a range of emotions such as pity and guilt, but his deficiencies often lead to a range of aggressive or violent behaviour. The psychopath is not, however, *completely* devoid of emotion; his deficits concern the inability to be moved by what happens to other people. For an example of someone who is a complete stranger to emotional states, we have perhaps to turn to science fiction. The character of Spock from the television programme *Star Trek* has been discussed by at least two philosophers in this context<sup>7</sup>.

The interesting feature of Spock is that he is not noticeably deficient in his cognitive abilities; he can reach the correct beliefs and he can evaluate things well enough, (though this may turn out to be an illusion). At any rate, the absence of emotion does not seem to impair his faculties in any obvious way, so the question arises, exactly what contribution *do* our emotions make to our cognitive lives? As weak cognitivism entails, it may be that the cognitive elements- of whatever sort- of an emotion can be had without having the emotion. Consequently an absence of emotion need bring with it no cognitive loss.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*. Ch.1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert Nozick, "Emotions", ch.9 of his collection *The Examined Life*. Michael Stocker also refers to Spock in *Valuing Emotions*.



Does this seem acceptable? Intuitively, it does not. We are, I think, inclined to say that someone who does not feel grief at the death of a loved one, say, or does not take pride in their achievements or the achievements of those close to them, or who is incapable of feeling shame, has a different grasp of the situation to the person who does. Do we really want to say that the only difference grief makes is that the cognition produces certain affects, but that there is no *cognitive* difference? To return for a moment to the question of pain which we considered in the previous chapter, we noted that pain was a crucial element of grief. And we considered there the question of whether the cognitive element of pain could be had without the *affect*, without the pain. In such a case do we want to say that the cognitive element is the same when accompanied by pain as without it? In that case what does the pain itself add? Why would we regard its absence as a kind of deficiency? According to the Humean picture, which we shall consider shortly, it cannot be a deficiency, since the absence merely reveals that a causal connection between the cognition and a non-cognitive disposition (the pain) has not established itself in this particular person. But whether someone has this disposition is a matter of luck<sup>8</sup>- it cannot be brought about by "seeing things correctly". A view of this sort is explicitly held by William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*;

"It is notorious that facts are compatible with opposite emotional comments, since the same fact will inspire entirely different feelings in different persons, and at different times in the same person; and there is no rationally deducible connection between any outer fact and the sentiments it may happen to provoke...So with fear, with indignation, jealousy, ambition, worship. If they

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<sup>8</sup> The topic of "moral luck" is of considerable relevance to the emotions, and I discuss it in chapter four. However it usually arises in terms of the events that befall someone and decide his happiness. It would be an additionally cruel aspect of such luck if it *were* simply fortuitous, as the Humean claims, whether a given way of looking at things brings about the pain of grief in me or not. Part of our hostility to this picture is perhaps this fact, that we do retain a hope that emotion can be educated, a hope which experience supports, at least to some extent.

are there, life changes. And whether they shall be there or not depends almost always upon non-logical, often on organic conditions.”<sup>9</sup>

According to this view, there is *nothing* wrong with Mr. Spock; nothing he doesn't grasp. When his relatives die he regards their demise unmoved, and the same occurs in all other instances which would normally produce emotion in us. But there is nothing he fails to understand. The contrary view - that there *is* something he doesn't grasp - is articulated by Martha Nussbaum. She is discussing Aeschylus' Agamemnon who kills his daughter as a sacrifice in order to appease the Gods and enable the fleet to sail for Troy. Nussbaum's view is that because Agamemnon is not grieved by his daughter's death, his understanding is deficient. After considering the view that a full understanding of our situation is available to the intellect alone, she goes on;

“We would do more justice to the Aeschylean claim by considering another possibility. Here we would see the passional reaction, the suffering, as itself a piece of practical recognition or perception, as at least a partial constituent of the character's correct understanding of his situation as a human being...And in general: to grasp either a love or a tragedy by intellect is not sufficient for having real human knowledge of it. Agamemnon *knows* Iphigenia is his child all through, if by this we mean that he has the correct beliefs, can answer many questions about her truly, etc. But because in his emotions, his imagination and his behaviour he does not acknowledge the tie, we want to join the chorus in saying that his state is less one of knowledge than one of delusion. He doesn't really know that she is his daughter. A piece of true understanding is missing.”<sup>10</sup>

Suppose that rather than grief, Agamemnon took *pleasure* in the death of his child. Would we say that his cognitive grasp was unaltered but unfortunately by a quirk of fate, that (negative?) cognition produced in him a feeling of

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<sup>9</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (P. 150).

<sup>10</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (p.45-46).



pleasure. We want to say, surely, that his cognitive grasp is different.<sup>11</sup> So I think we want to say two things; first that pleasure and pain involve different cognitive elements, and second, that the cognitive elements involved are not the same as those which exist minus the affect. That is; the pain of grief is cognitively distinct from the pleasure of joy (in the same object) and secondly, those cognitions are not the same as those neutral cognitions Mr. Spock would have. And these claims together amount to strong cognitivism.

## Some Objections.

An objection that might be raised at this point is this; it might be said that weak cognitivism would be enough. Mr. Spock is certainly not *cognitively* deficient, it might be said, but it is still *some* kind of a deficiency - though not a cognitive one- that he is not *pained* by the death of his loved ones. The real deficiency is not located by searching for a *cognitive* difference, the objection might continue; the real problem is that he doesn't *feel* bad as a result of what he knows<sup>12</sup>.

I agree that we do locate the important difference in the first place in the fact that he does not *feel pained*. However the real issue is whether it can be said to be a *deficiency*. If the only difference were that mental pain was not

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<sup>11</sup> Although granting this does not amount to accepting strong cognitivism, as noted in the last chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Nozick (Op.Cit.) argues in this way. He then has to explain why the feeling of an emotion is valuable and its absence open to criticism. His solution is what he calls the "Analogue" defence; he argues that the sense in which the feeling of an emotion is appropriate to the judgement component is that it is an "analogue" of that judgement. In chapter one I mentioned one way in which feeling and judgement are appropriate, which is similar to Nozick's. But explaining why the feeling is appropriate does not explain why its absence should be a fault. (See above).

produced in him by his cognitions it is hard to see how this would constitute a deficiency. If by that term we mean something neutral akin to a *lack*, then we merely restate the fact that he is not pained- he lacks pain. But as Nussbaum's remarks suggest, we are inclined to think that this is not merely a lack but a *failure*. To describe Agamemnon as emotionally deficient is a *criticism*. But it *could* only be a criticism if his feeling pained or not was something more than simply a matter of luck. But that is just what it cannot be if weak cognitivism is true. Either the cognitive element produces pain or it does not. But which it is, is beyond the control of the agent<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, we might feel bound to insist that there is something appropriate in the painful *feelings* of grief; that they are appropriate to the cognitive element in a way that pleasurable feelings would not be. This is an important point; we should be wary of over intellectualising the emotions. After all, a crucial fact about emotions is the way they feel. Agamemnon's lack of emotion is a lack of feeling pained. The person who feels grief feels a pain that "complements" the cognitive state he is in. So we are entitled to say that the person who lacks emotion lacks an appropriate element. However, although this is an important point to emphasise, I do not see that this thought entitles us to *criticise* those who lack emotions. After all, since what is at stake is a causal connection, how can someone be blamed if such a connection does not obtain. Nor does this meet our intuition that there is something *cognitively* deficient in the affectless. So, while it is correct to insist that feelings are appropriate and inappropriate, I think we cannot escape the fact that the importance of emotions must ultimately be explained in cognitive terms, if at all.

The arguments above do not claim to establish strong cognitivism; they merely attempt to show that our intuitions about emotions cannot be satisfied by weak cognitivism alone. And here a second objection might be raised. It may be said that even if we allow that for a range of emotions (perhaps those

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<sup>13</sup> This is because on the Humean picture, the non-cognitive disposition to be pained, and so the affect itself, are "original existences"; they exist, where they do, underived from rational or cognitive grounds. See below.



most obviously within the “ethical” realm, however that is to be defined) strong cognitivism is required, that is only so for a small proportion of emotions. As far as the rest are concerned, we do not regard the absence of emotion as something to be criticised; in fact we allow considerable latitude in emotional responses.

Gabriele Taylor, in her discussion of the Joyce story which I quoted in the previous chapter, makes a point like this. One reason why we should doubt Davidson’s picture of Gabriel’s shame as underwritten by a universal belief, she claims, is that Gabriel might not be prepared to commit himself to such a universal proposition. The universal in question, remember is of the form, “If one’s... then one should feel shame”. In other words it is prescriptive- it sets out, amongst other things, how *others* should - rationally speaking- react in such cases. But Taylor replies that Gabriel might not want to commit himself to this prescription. Nor does this need to involve any inconsistency. Universalisability as discussed by Hare, for example, is the result of consistency; if a given action is wrong due to features A, B, and C, then *all things being equal* any other case possessing those same features must also be wrong<sup>14</sup>. So I am committed to universalising for myself *and others* on pain of contradiction. But the case of shame is not like this, says Taylor. Gabriel might understand that it is only due to the combination of the features of the situation and his *conception of himself* that he feels shame. He might feel that a different person in the same situation would legitimately react differently, and so for a case like this, weak cognitivism would be sufficient and strong cognitivism too strong.

Suppose I judge that an object in front of me is a triangle, or that the sum of two given numbers is nine; am I committed to the thought that if you do not give the same answers in these cases you are wrong? It would seem that I am; how *could* I believe that the shape I see is a triangle but also accept that you may quite legitimately reach a different answer? In this way judgements

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<sup>14</sup> Things are more complicated than this, of course, since those same features might be present in another case, but in company with new features, not present in the first case which legitimately alter what we say about it.

about matters of fact seem to commit the person making them to universalisability.

We accept something similar in aesthetic contexts also; if I think Proust is really a better writer than Harold Robbins, how can I accept your contrary judgement? Here again then, making a putatively factual judgement commits the person making it to ruling out rival judgements. The same will no doubt be true in ethical cases. If I think betraying a friend is wrong in a given situation, I cannot, it appears, in consistency accept your opinion to the contrary<sup>15</sup>. But if this is the case, and emotions involve "seeing things right", and I, for example am angered by a given situation, how can I allow your quite contrary emotion to be equally legitimate. If it is, the question cannot be a factual or cognitive one. So it seems that if strong cognitivism is true we are committed to universalisability, and this is unacceptable given the latitude we allow for differences in emotional reaction. Therefore strong cognitivism cannot be true.

In replying to this objection there are several points which need to be made. First of all, let us admit that there is a range of emotional states regarding which we do allow legitimate disagreement, and Taylor seems to be right in thinking that pride is one of them. Now, if Taylor is right in thinking that we give latitude for disagreement in our emotional reactions, how widespread is this? The answer is, I think, not very widespread. Consider; if a friend reacts furiously to a casual remark, do we assume that there is no question of seeing things *appropriately* here? Surely not- we may rightly protest that the remark was an innocent one, and that the friend is being "unreasonable". Similarly it seems that people can be proud, jealous, frightened, or envious inappropriately. So here we do not think that "anything goes". And this is really just the point that was made in the first chapter, that emotions can be assessed rationally. And this is because they involve a cognitive element, some representation of how things are (call it for the moment a *thought*). The

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<sup>15</sup> Although here, too, there may be exceptions; Peter Winch argues that we are not committed to universalisability in all ethical cases in his "Universalisability of Moral Judgement" in *Ethics and Action*.



point we have already made is that the cognitive element can be appropriate or inappropriate, rational or irrational. In some situations it is irrational to think you have been slighted, or that what you have achieved is very worthwhile, and so on.

When an emotion rests on cognitive assessments which are inappropriate, we criticise them. And this seems to be a possibility that extends *throughout* the range of emotional experience. And given all this, we can make a second point. The possibility of this kind of rational assessment of emotions- the idea that some responses are "wrong", for example- does *not* require strong cognitivism. Weak cognitivism can also allow for this kind of critical assessment, because it allows that the cognitive element can be assessed.

Although weak cognitivism can allow this, there is another kind of criticism it cannot engage in, as we have already seen. Faced with someone who has the appropriate cognitions, but no *emotion*, weak cognitivism must remain silent. Such a person cannot be said to be irrational or inappropriate, since their cognitive states are not misguided. Consequently, if I am, say, angered by an insult and you are not, weak cognitivism cannot support the claim by either one of us that the other is mistaken in his reaction<sup>16</sup>. Weak cognitivism can criticise emotions based on inappropriate cognitions, but can say nothing about affectless cognitions. It is the possibility of *this* kind of criticism which requires strong cognitivism. But this kind of disagreement is only one kind of disagreement over emotional reactions. So the objection considered above is really an objection to rational assessment as such, and not really strong cognitivism.

However, if there is a wide range of cases in which we do tolerate the kinds of disagreement mentioned, then the objection may still have some force. But I think it is already clear that we do not think this. We do not think that in most, or even many, cases, emotional responses are beyond rational assessment. What, then, about cases where the disagreement is between

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<sup>16</sup> Assuming, of course, that we both have the same, correct cognitions.

those who have an emotion and those who do not, but who share the same cognitions<sup>17</sup>? Is there not room for legitimate disagreement here?

Well, in some cases at least the case for a negative answer is a strong one. If we return to the example of Agamemnon, we do think there is some point to the criticism that an unemotional reaction is a deficient one. There are however, other cases where, although an unemotional reaction may be thought deficient, there may not be agreement on *which* emotional reaction is *fitting*.

If I and a friend both have personal items stolen, say, I may react with sadness at the loss of a treasured possession, while he reacts with anger. This difference in reaction also represents a difference in *focus*. The focus of my emotion is the object I have lost and its significance, his focus is the thief and the injustice of the act. In such a case we may want to say that *both* emotions would be appropriate, and so my friend and I cannot reasonably criticise each other's reaction. However, I think that while it is true that both reactions *may* be appropriate, this in itself may not however, preclude criticism. This may be more obvious if we imagine an alteration to the case; imagine now that my friend and I return home to find our families massacred, and we produce the same pattern of reaction as above. Here there may be room for criticism on both sides. On his side, he may criticise my lack of anger and resolve to seek justice; for my part, I may find that his reaction inappropriately rushes over the deaths of his family to the killers. Perhaps ideally we should each feel both emotions (however, the value of anger in particular has, at various points in history, been contested by different groups and creeds- for example, the Buddhist, the Christian.)

I think there is, then, enough here to make it plausible that even in these cases where we do feel different emotions, we do not accept that "anything goes". If we compare my friend's reaction in the two cases to the reactions of a Mr. Spock, we would regard Spock with suspicion. The loss of a prized possession should provoke *some* reaction, whether it is anger or sadness. When it produces *no* reaction we think something is missing in his attitude.

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<sup>17</sup> I assume this so as not to beg any questions in favour of strong cognitivism.



The objection we began with then, now looks misguided. But what about the cases such as pride, cited by Taylor, in which we do accept differences in reaction? Taylor is right about these cases, but it does not support the general objection we have been considering. First of all, there is the obvious point that we do not all experience pride, say, at the same things. This may be because something that means a lot to me means nothing to you. Alternatively, something may be an achievement for you, but something which I take for granted. This is true of other emotions of self-assessment also, such as shame and regret. The important point is that these emotions also involve an assessment, not just of the action or situation, but of ourselves. In the example from "The Dead", Gabriel's shame is the product of his grasp of the situation in conjunction with his picture of himself. His assessment of the situation, in fact *reflects* his grasp of himself. He sees himself as the sort of person who "orates to vulgarians"; but this is not simply an assessment of his audience, but of himself too. Taylor is right in claiming that we allow that such factors help determine our emotional reactions in these cases. But this is because we think such differences *legitimately* enter as factors, and not because we think these emotions beyond criticism.

Having, I hope, met the objection to strong cognitivism which we have been considering, I conclude that at *least* in a range of cases, our ideas about emotions will require strong cognitivism. Weak cognitivism can satisfy the demand that emotions be subject to rational scrutiny, which amounts to saying that the beliefs or cognitive *elements* of emotions are subject to rational scrutiny. If, on the other hand we also think there is something inappropriate about an *absence* of emotion, weak cognitivism cannot help. For the weak cognitivist there is nothing the matter with Mr. Spock. In the next section I will set out briefly the Humean challenge to cognitivism.

## Humean Psychology.

Humean psychology is best brought out in the context of our moral thought since it is here that it is most controversial. According to our everyday, common sense ideas about morality, two things are true. First of all, there are moral facts. When I say that torturing children is *wrong* we generally take statements of this sort to describe something true, something factual. Ordinarily, we do not think this sort of thing is just a matter of opinion. Secondly, we also think that understanding such facts *motivates*. If we interviewed a child torturer who protested vociferously that he believed the torture of children to be morally wrong, we would feel compelled to ask him how he squared his beliefs with his actions. This is because we generally suppose that moral understanding is not adrift from motivation and action.

It is a consequence of these two facts about our moral ideas that we also think that moral facts provide *reasons* for action. The *fact* that torturing children is wrong, and the fact that such moral truths impinge on action means that the torturer has a reason not to torture - namely, that it is wrong. Furthermore, we would not be impressed if the torturer tried to defend himself by claiming that he just wasn't disposed to stop torturing, and that in fact he enjoyed it. We would still insist that despite his dispositions he had a reason not to torture.

According to Humean psychology, however, there are two general sorts of mental entities; cognitive ones such as beliefs, and non-cognitive ones such as desires. Action and motivation are the result of a pair of items, a belief and a desire. For any such pair it is always possible to imagine the belief without the desire. I may, for example believe there is a glass of water on the table, without being motivated to do anything. If I want a drink, on the other hand, the combination of the belief and the desire now motivate me. The important point about this picture is that the desire is what Hume terms an "original existence"; you either have them or you don't. In particular, they are not



brought about by the other sort of states, the cognitive ones. Consequently, desires are not rationally assessable at all<sup>18</sup>.

But this picture clashes with the common-sense picture of value, above. According to that picture, the torturer has a reason not to torture children, *whatever* his desires and inclinations happen to be. But on the Humean view, some fact only constitutes a *reason* if it *does* connect with a suitable desire or disposition. That the torturer is not disposed to stop torturing means he doesn't *have* a reason to stop.

Essentially this is the problem we have already been looking at in relation to emotions. Since cognitions are separable from desires and other non-cognitive elements, and since those non-cognitive elements are original existences, an absence of the non-cognitive elements cannot be criticised. This is a version of the problem we encountered with Spock; if he isn't pained by his cognitions then that is something beyond criticism.

The only way to reject the Humean picture in the context of the general issue of value is to insist that there are in fact cognitions which motivate without the aid of original existences<sup>19</sup>. This view means that correct understanding is *not* separable from motivation<sup>20</sup>; to be motivated is to see

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<sup>18</sup> With one caveat; some desires may be irrational if they are based on another pair of belief and desire, and the belief is false. For example, I might want to avoid spiders because of their unpleasant smell, and this will be based on a desire to avoid unpleasant smells and a belief that spiders smell unpleasantly. My desire is here, in a sense "irrational" because it is based on a false belief. The example is taken from Michael Smith, "The Moral Problem", (p.8)

<sup>19</sup> There are many defenders of cognitivism about value and they do not all share the same views. Among them are John McDowell (Op. cit.), Jonathan Dancy (Op. Cit.), and Michael Smith (Op. Cit.). They all share the rejection of Humean psychology, of course.

<sup>20</sup> This may seem unreasonably strong; maybe on an off-colour day I'm not so struck by what would normally motivate me (a friend's plight), or in the analogous emotional case, I listen to a piece of music that normally I find very moving, and am not moved. Is it plausible that what I lack here is cognitive? But I think this is only implausible if we are still thinking of cognition in terms of *belief*; certainly those are not impaired. But do I really *hear* the music in the same way I do when it moves me; do I focus on the aspects of my friend's plight as I might normally? It therefore remains plausible I think that it is a cognitive difference which is important in these cases.

correctly. In the case of emotions, it means that cognitions relevant to emotions are not separable from them. To lack emotions, therefore, is to lack understanding, and that is what is wrong with Mr. Spock.

In the next section I consider the response of some philosophers to these issues. But first, let us consider what has been established. I noted above that it might be said that all that has been shown is that for a restricted type of emotion our intuitions require strong cognitivism. But this, it may be said, amounts to no more than the claim that cognitivism about *moral values* must be true. In other words, the question of strong cognitivism is really about the nature of moral value and not about the nature of emotion; we may admit that *some* emotions are based on moral values, but the majority are not.

I have already suggested that we have some reason to deny this for the other cases of emotion. But in addition to this there is a further point to be made regarding the term "moral". The objection just made assumes there is a distinct class of facts which are *sui generis*; the class of *moral* facts. It is cognitive appreciation of these facts that is motivating. Other, everyday facts are not of this sort. They require the addition of an "original existence" to motivate. If this picture were correct, it would indeed seem to limit in a fairly precise way the scope of strong cognitivism. But is it correct?

It has not been *thought* obviously correct by some philosophers who support cognitivism. According to Jonathan Dancy<sup>21</sup>, for example, the features of a situation which motivate are the ordinary, "natural" features of it<sup>22</sup>. There need be no appeal to a distinct kind of moral fact. However, Dancy does allow that the cognitive content of the perceptions of the motivated and the unmotivated person are not the same. Although the "natural facts" are at some level open to all, our cognitive grasp of a situation is more finely tuned than this. The motivated, or virtuous person sees certain features as "salient", and perceives a "shape" in the situation. Discussing the so-called "thin" moral properties of "rightness" and "wrongness" he continues,

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<sup>21</sup> Dancy, (Op. Cit. P.115).

<sup>22</sup> This is only half true; see below.



“Instead of taking the thin properties as the final level of the resultance<sup>23</sup> tree, we are to see an action’s being right or one which ought to be done as identical with the shape of the circumstances- what it is about them that calls for just action. To see the action as required by the circumstances is to see the situation as having a certain shape...Here we are trying to tread a difficult path between saying that the thin property is distinct from the thicker ones from which it results, and saying that it is somehow identical with them (a non-naturalistic form of reductionism).”<sup>24</sup>

This kind of account, according to which the motivating feature of a situation is not a special *kind of fact* but rather a cognitive reorganisation of understanding is strikingly similar to the notion of aspect perception, to be discussed in the next chapter. It also echoes the things we said about emotion generally at the end of the first chapter, that the person in the emotional state *sees* the situation differently. I cannot settle the issue of whether this kind of theory is correct. However it has at least *prima facie* plausibility. One reason is this; the assumption that seems most of all to motivate the Humean picture of psychology is the idea that the “facts” are the normal empirical facts of sensory experience, and as such are open to all. This is explicit in the account of emotional states given by William James, above. Consequently, when those facts motivate me but not you, we must look for some psychological difference between us to explain my motivation. And since the difference cannot be a cognitive one, it must be a difference in motivation.

But if the empiricist account of “the facts” is not credible<sup>25</sup>, we will not be driven to seek our explanation in *non-cognitive* differences. This does not of course show that strong cognitivism is true, but it does remove one of the pressures which seemed to make it inevitably false. In addition, if Dancy’s account, or something like it, is correct then strong cognitivism will not be restricted to a narrow range of emotions- those based on *moral facts*. In any

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<sup>23</sup> Dancy’s concept of “resultance” is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>24</sup> (Op. Cit.p.115-116)

<sup>25</sup> This point is argued in the next chapter.

case, the range of emotions for which we might want strong cognitivism to be true may be wider than the narrow sphere of the moral. On Aristotle's account, to be discussed later, this is the case. To give just one example, we might think it a good thing that a parent take joy in playing with their children, and we might think it a kind of defect if they don't<sup>26</sup>. This case, though, does not obviously fall within the domain of the "moral" as conventionally conceived.

To some, no doubt, the idea that emotions of this sort should be thought open to rational *criticism* will seem unappealing and invasive. And if we recall the strong notion of universalisability discussed by Taylor, and the idea we met in Davidson's account, that an emotion could be rationally *required* by other beliefs the agent has, we may begin to share this unease. It can, however, be mitigated to some extent, I think, by contrasting Dancy's account with Davidson's.

For Dancy, when we say that someone is not seeing the situation in the right way, that they are blind to facts which *should* motivate them, and *would* motivate them if only they could grasp them, there is indeed a sense of criticism available. We can still say that Agamemnon should see things differently. But there are no "neutral facts" outwith the perspective of his seeing things correctly that we can adduce to persuade, or rationally compel him to accept the rationality of the action or emotion. On this picture, the traditional idea of an *argument* is not effective. According to that picture, we begin with premises that every rational person accepts and then lead our interlocutor to a conclusion that he cannot, *without inconsistency*, deny. But on Dancy's picture there *is* no such argument<sup>27</sup>.

This makes an important difference. For Dancy, the rationality of the value, action or emotion is *internal* to the perspective from which it is seen to be correct. Consequently, its rationality is not *inferred* in any way. It is not

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<sup>26</sup> The example is from Peter Winch, "Moral Integrity", in *Ethics and Action*.

<sup>27</sup> Dancy's account here draws heavily on Wittgenstein's ideas about the rationality of rule-following. This issue is picked up in the next chapter. The same point is made by John McDowell in "Virtue and Reason".



inferred from premises he is forced to accept or other beliefs he anyway holds. It is the aspect of inference (about which more will be said later) which helps fuel the unease noted above. It yields a picture according to which we insist that someone is compelled, by force of argument to accept a certain conclusion. This is Davidson's picture. But we feel that forcing someone to accept a *conclusion*, is first of all missing the point as far as feeling emotion is concerned. And in addition, on Dancy's model, persuasion by assisting the person to *see* things in a given way is the only kind of argument that can work. And this looks less like logical arm-twisting.

It is also worth pausing at this point for a second to signpost a more general issue. We find in the Davidsonian account of rationality a very familiar picture. According to that picture, rationality and understanding are the result of *inference*, achieved by means of a *procedure*. These are features of a dominant view of what understanding is which will be challenged both in the following chapter and throughout. Against this, I argue, following Wittgenstein, that understanding does *not* involve a procedure and is *not* the result of inference.

So, having set out the case for the possibility and desirability of cognitivism, I will briefly consider one reaction to the idea<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> There is an additional argument *in favour* of cognitivism, derived from John McDowell, which relies on the uncodifiable nature of moral understanding. I leave discussion of that argument until the next chapter, where the issue of codifiability is discussed.

## A “Moderate” Cognitivism?

Some philosophers<sup>29</sup> have wanted to accept the intuitions about emotions which we have discussed but tried to do so without embracing strong cognitivism. That is, they have attempted to argue both that emotions are necessary for correct understanding and also that Humean psychology is broadly correct. This is what I have claimed cannot be done. So it is worth seeing how such an account would go. I will call this kind of view “moderate” cognitivism to distinguish it from the other two types.

Michael Stocker argues that we should not think of the importance of emotion as located in its cognitive component, because this is affectless, or “dry” as he calls it. He focuses his attack on writers like Pitcher, Bedford and Solomon,<sup>30</sup> who do emphasise the cognitive elements. Just as he is at pains to emphasise that the affect of an emotion is not reducible to other elements of it, so the value of an emotion is not simply in its cognitive elements.

Yet Stocker also claims that emotion is crucial for correct understanding. Citing the work of psychologists and psychiatrists he argues that those who suffer serious emotional disorders also suffer serious cognitive disorders. So emotional disorders are closely connected with cognitive disorders. But Stocker does not want to say that emotional disorders *are* just cognitive disorders, for the reasons already given. Since cognitions are separable from affects, it can be at best a contingent fact that certain cognitions and affects tend to go hand in hand, “as a package” (p. 124). And the contingency is ultimately that for the most part we *happen to have* the relevant dispositions to be affected by certain cognitions.

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<sup>29</sup> I will discuss Michael Stocker, *Valuing Emotions* and Justin Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions*.

<sup>30</sup> Pitcher, “Emotions”, *Mind* 1965; Bedford, “Emotion”, *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society* 1956; Solomon, *The Passions*.



His main claim about emotions is that they help us to *focus* on what is valuable, to notice it and act on it. For example, he argues - on the basis of psychiatric sources - that schizoid patients, due to a lack of affect, can become cynical and callous, insensitive to the hurt they do to others, and in his discussion of anti-Semitism he argues that the perceptions of the anti-Semite are skewed because of the underlying emotion. This last point he claims, shows that emotion interacts with cognition not simply through its cognitive element, but through its *affective* element. It is this element that frames the perceptions of the anti-Semite.

These conclusions are no doubt correct. In chapter one I quoted Aristotle's remark that the frightened person, as a result of his fear, is more than normally sensitive to what he may take for danger. A more general neurological argument to this effect has been offered by Antonio Damasio<sup>31</sup>. Patients suffering localised lesions to certain parts of the brain have been found to suffer specific kinds of inabilities. Although they could perform well across a range of cognitive tests, they found it extremely difficult to make mundane decisions, such as fixing a time for an appointment. On further investigation it appeared that their ability to engage in imaginative moral deliberation was also impaired. Damasio's hypothesis (The "Somatic Marker" Hypothesis) was that these patients had suffered damage to the area of the brain associated with emotional functioning. The function of emotions, he hypothesised, was to "tag" significant items for attention. In deliberation, the "tagged" items would stand out. In the absence of this tagging the subject was literally unable to make decisions which required some ordering of value.

This problem is related to another, this time in Artificial Intelligence, known as the "Frame Problem"<sup>32</sup>. In programming a computer or robot to

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<sup>31</sup> In his book, *Descartes' Error*. The title is slightly ironic, since Descartes seems to have held a similar view to Damasio's about the function of emotion. But the error which the title refers to is Dualism.

<sup>32</sup> The connection between the Frame Problem and emotion is noticed by Ronald De Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*. The "Frame Problem" itself is discussed in Daniel Dennett, "Cognitive Wheels; The Frame Problem of AI". In Boden (ed) *The Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence*.

make the right decisions in the right contexts, programmers have somehow to enable the robot to work through a check list of factors, generated by the rules programmed into it, and decide which ones are relevant and which not. But since the multiplicity of varying factors is enormous, the number of deliberative computations the robot would have to go through is for practical purposes endless. What is required is for the robot to know *which* deliberations are irrelevant, and leave those aside. But the puzzle is that it needs to know this *without* going through the deliberation *first*. If it *concludes* the deliberation is irrelevant, that won't do, since that will involve going through it. So how can the robot know what is relevant without having to *work it out*? And this is the link with Damasio's patients. Perhaps what the computer lacks is something like a "tagging" system will puts the important features into relief.

The reason for elaborating Stocker's point and relating it to Damasio is that it may show that, contrary to what I have suggested so far, there is strong empirical case for thinking that a life without emotion or affect *would* be different, and *cognitively* different. We would be unable to think properly. This is an interesting result, of course. However there are some questions we might ask. First, does the "tagging" system work merely at the "computational" or neural level, or does it affect our *experience* of things. I think it is supposed to do the latter- things are supposed to seem important, appealing, motivating *in deliberation*.

If so, this now sounds not unlike Dancy's version of the experience of value, quoted above; that our experience of things is subtly altered; features are salient, the whole has a "shape". Tagging might amount to giving a feature *salience*. But in Dancy's version this amounts to altering the aspect of the situation, it is a cognitive difference<sup>33</sup>. In this respect at least, the "marker"

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<sup>33</sup> One thought which may arise in view of the "tagging" construal is this; if it is the case that the affective element of a cognition makes a difference, that it does produce a distinct cognition, then it follows that we have shown how the cognitions of those in emotional states are distinct from those who have "mere" cognitions without affects. And, more importantly, we have done so without having to embrace anti-Humean cognitivism, for on this view it is



hypothesis is compatible with the idea that emotion involves a distinct kind of *cognition*. And this view has been expressed by other writers. Oliver Sacks<sup>34</sup> describes an autistic patient who was cognitively unimpaired across a wide range of abilities but who did not have the normal range of emotional experience. She could empathise with cattle, but not with most human emotion. She had never really experienced beauty and felt that her relations with other humans were severely impaired by her deficit; not merely because the lack of shared feeling made trust difficult, but because she could not *understand* a range of gestures and communication normal humans could. Recalling her childhood relations with other children she said,

“I could never figure out why I didn't fit in”. [Sacks continues] Something was going on between the other kids, something swift, subtle, constantly changing- an exchange of meanings, a negotiation, a swiftness of understanding so remarkable that sometimes she wondered if they were all

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the affect which alters the cognition, not vice versa. I agree that this is an alternative way of defending the claim that emotions involve distinct cognitions. However, there are several reasons, I think, for still preferring the cognitivist account. The first is that we still want it to be the case that emotional *education* is a possibility; that we can get ourselves to see things correctly. But the concept of emotional education presupposes cognitivism. The alternative just outlined does not allow for this view of education since it still relies on the (contingent) presence of the affect to shape the cognition in the desired way. But acquiring the affect is not something we can *learn*. It is still, in Hume's sense, an “original existence”. Secondly, a question arises over the content of the affect. Since it must have some cognitive *content*, its content must be the same as the cognition; that is, it must be a disposition to be affected by things of a certain sort, and exactly *what* sort will be the content of the affect. But then it seems that the cognitive element is already *pre-figured* in the affect. This objection is taken up in the next chapter in the discussion of John McDowell's work.

<sup>34</sup> Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*. Noel Carroll also discusses what he calls the “criterial prefocussing” function of emotion, in relation to narrative works of art, in *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, ch.4.

telepathic. She is now aware of the existence of these social signals. She can infer them, she says, but she herself cannot perceive them.”<sup>35</sup>

Here, the absence of emotion makes *understanding* of a certain kind impossible. It is not that she cannot *interpret* things, but that she can't see them correctly<sup>36</sup>. Here too, it seems, emotion does give rise to unique cognitions. This kind of account is therefore distinct from Stocker's.

His view, recall, was that emotion is essential for full understanding- emotional deficits result in cognitive deficits- but that the cognitive elements of emotions are separable from and insufficient for the emotion. So if emotions are essential for right understanding it can't be because they provide an extra, and unique, cognitive element. But then how *could* they be essential for understanding? There is only one alternative; if emotions are not necessary for correct understanding because they *constitute* a unique grasp of things, it could only be because they are in some way *instrumentally necessary* if the person is to reach correct understanding. And this would require some explanation of why the affectless can't reach correct understanding.

Stocker himself, in fact, provides a fair analogy. Mathematicians, he says<sup>37</sup>, will need to be emotionally engaged with their subject if they are to wrestle with technical problems and persist in spite of difficulties until they get results. So emotions of certain sorts will be essential to mathematics, says Stocker, and something like this is true of emotion and understanding generally.<sup>38</sup>

In a sense, this is correct. But what it means is simply that if mathematicians are to have enough energy and persistence to carry on, then

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<sup>35</sup> Sacks (p.259). Notice also the reference to *inference*; she acknowledges that there is something she can't *perceive*.

<sup>36</sup> Another example of this kind of account is given by Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence*. Child psychologists claim, he says, that many of those children who become bullies are prone to consistent mis-perception; they see slights and aggression where there are none. This cognitive problem has affective roots.

<sup>37</sup> Stocker (p.134)

<sup>38</sup> Similar explanations of the importance of emotion are offered by Oakley (Op. Cit. P.51)



they must be interested. The role of emotion here is not too unlike the role which sleep and glucose tablets might play in the pursuit of mathematical knowledge. Above all, it sits ill with Stocker's explicit denial that emotions are not merely of *instrumental* importance for understanding. Stocker is aware of the difficulty, and phrases it as the objection that emotion might be essential to *mathematicians* but not mathematics. His reply however is less than convincing. The objection, in the context of our understanding of value, would be that emotion is important for valuers but not for value. Stocker says that he is, "dubious about the strength or extent of the distinction" (p.135).

So while he is prepared to acknowledge that there are mathematical facts on the one hand and mathematicians on the other, and the former can exist unknown, a similar distinction is not available, he says, between value-facts and those who become aware of them. But I can see no reason for accepting this, and Stocker certainly offers none. I conclude then that Stocker has *not* shown how emotion is essential to understanding in the way he claims.

The tagging hypothesis as I have interpreted it shows how it could be, because it also shows how emotion generates new cognitive experience. What Stocker wants to deny is that emotion aids cognition simply by offering more *cognition*. For him, this emphasis leaves out the fact that we are *affected*, and it is by its affective element that emotion works to produce understanding. The example of the anti-Semite was an attempt to show how that might be so. Even there, however, it seems that the emotion produces cognitive changes; the anti-Semite always sees things a certain way rather than another, some features are salient and others not.<sup>39</sup> Damasio's account as I interpret it shows how emotion does generate unique kinds of cognitive experience.

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<sup>39</sup> A good example of salience in the context of the phenomenology of experience occurs in Sartre's discussion of the impersonator Franconay imitating Maurice Chevalier (*The Psychology of the Imagination*). In terms of appearance, she is not like Chevalier, but these details do not affect the success of the impersonation. Sartre says they are "overridden". Alternatively, we might say, they are not salient. And here salience would affect the overall aspect.

Emotion does, therefore have intrinsic connections with understanding. On Stocker's view, I claim, it does not<sup>40</sup>.

Equally, since Stocker accepts the Humean picture of psychology<sup>41</sup>, it is a contingent fact that a certain cognition gives rise to an affect. But his brand of cognitivism is stronger than the weak form in one crucial respect; he adds the empirical claim that, as it happens, most of us tend to have the relevant dispositions required to produce affects given the relevant cognitions. In short, although it is false to claim - as strong cognitivism does - that cognitions are sufficient to produce affects it is true that for practical purposes they usually are. And so we needn't really get worked up about the issue of separating cognitions and affects<sup>42</sup>. I shall label Stocker's view "moderate cognitivism"; we can set it out as follows;

### *Moderate Cognitivism.*

- a) Cognitive elements and affects are causally related.
- b) Cognitive elements and affects are conceptually/logically distinct
- c) Cognitions are not sufficient to produce affects; happily, however, we tend to have the dispositions additionally required for producing them.

Stocker's position is different from strong cognitivism in that he thinks that cognitions aren't sufficient for affects. This also means, first, that many people *do* have the same cognitive states as those who have emotions without themselves having emotions. Secondly, when someone does have an emotion, they do so only because they also, and fortuitously, have the relevant

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<sup>40</sup> Stocker insists that he is ascribing intrinsic value to emotions, but his defence of this is rather vague (Cf. P 134-135). Another writer who lauds the value of emotion but provides instrumental explanations of its value is Daniel Goleman, in *Emotional Intelligence*. Goleman however does emphasise the role of emotion in altering cognitive experience. (Cf.Ch.15)

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Stocker(p.48-50).

<sup>42</sup> He says (p.132) that although they are logically distinct, separating them even in theory - when doing philosophical psychology- is "carrying philosophical analysis too far". But if they are separable, then there are questions which I think his theory leaves unanswered.



(Humean)disposition<sup>43</sup>. Consequently, an absence of emotion cannot be criticised, for reasons already given.

We can contrast this with strong cognitivism. According to that view, the cognitive states associated with emotions only exist *as part of* those emotional states, because the cognitive state is sufficient for the emotion<sup>44</sup>. Secondly, absence of emotion is a *cognitive* deficiency since it means that the individual is not in the correct cognitive state. An important point to make clear here is that strong cognitivism itself still relies on a *causal* connection between cognition and affect, and maintains that *that* connection is not one that can be learned. In other words, the claim that cognitions are sufficient for affects rests on the claim that there is a causal relation between these two which always obtains. If Mr. Spock and Agamemnon *could* get into the right cognitive state then they *would* also have the emotion<sup>45</sup>. But their failure to get into that state is a *cognitive* failure. Weak cognitivism, by contrast, allows that they could be in the *right* cognitive state and *not* have the emotion.

Once we make the assumption that an emotion is a cognition and an affect produced by that cognition, there is no way to argue that the affect adds anything *cognitive* to the emotion. What strong cognitivism does is accept this and still try to show why there *is* a cognitive difference between the affectless and those in emotional states; namely that only those with emotions *have* those cognitions. If, however, we want more from our account of emotional states, we have really only two alternatives. First we can try to argue that the affective element *does* make a cognitive difference, or second we can try to argue that the deficiency of the affectless is not a cognitive deficiency; that the affect itself is valuable. The second of these was considered briefly above, and

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<sup>43</sup> Although it may not be *entirely* fortuitous; there are likely to be evolutionary considerations, for instance, which will favour the acquisition of some dispositions rather than others. This does not however effect the point at issue.

<sup>44</sup> This, to repeat, is because the emotion does not require a Humean *disposition* which is an original existence.

<sup>45</sup> Although even on this view, it might seem there is no *cognitive* difference between the right cognitive state with the emotion and the right cognitive state without the emotion. But on this view there *are* no cases of the right cognition without the emotion. Although we can logically separate them, in practise they never occur separately.

the conclusion drawn was that it could not support our intuitions about emotions. The first, for reasons already considered, is not plausible. Martha Nussbaum has recently argued - as above- that emotion is a kind of seeing. Strong cognitivism tries to accommodate this intuition, in the teeth of the stubborn fact that the cognitive and the affective are separable. It succeeds, but no doubt not in a way that would satisfy Nussbaum, I think. In support of her own view, she argues along Stoic lines that an emotion *just is* a cognitive state. But this view simply flies in the face of the facts; nor does it acknowledge the apparent difference between cognitive and affective components or attempt in any way to show how, despite appearances, the distinction is an error.

It may of course be that our folk psychological distinction between cognition and affect is merely a theoretical approximation to reality. It may be that while adequate for a range of issues, it breaks down in the case of emotions; it threatens strong intuitions we have about our emotional lives and drives us, in search of the necessary support, to theoretical improvisations like strong cognitivism. If this picture is correct and our crude taxonomy of the mental only leads us astray, then it may be that our intuitions about our emotions do not require us to resort to theories such as strong cognitivism. This is a possibility. However, while we still think of our mental lives in terms of distinct categories such as affect and cognition, strong cognitivism, I think, is the best we can do in support our intuitions. My conclusion then is that Stocker's "moderate" cognitivism still leaves our intuitions about emotions unfulfilled because his view does not explain how we can criticise emotional failure.

This concludes the present chapter which has attempted to lay out the issue of cognitivism. Several of the issues raised in this chapter will be developed in the next; the nature of understanding, the role of inference and procedure and the codifiability of knowledge. I start though, by attempting to provide the account of aspect-perception which will complete the account of emotional states given in chapter one.



## Chapter Three; Aspects and Understanding.

I ended chapter one with the suggestion that emotions are best thought of as involving a form of cognition in some ways like seeing. In the present chapter I will offer a more detailed description of the kind of cognitive state involved. Additionally I aim to show how such states are related to understanding more generally. To do this I consider Wittgenstein's discussion of three facets of understanding; "seeing-as"; rule-following; and "secondary sense". The picture of understanding which emerges from Wittgenstein's discussion is worth spelling out because it is opposed in clear ways to many elements of our common sense picture of understanding. Our common-sense views carry a lot of historical/philosophical baggage, and this can bar the way to clearer understanding. I would claim that some of the views we have already encountered, for example in Davidson's account of emotion, are the product of more basic assumptions about understanding and rationality. Wittgenstein's account, I claim helps us to make clearer the basic errors involved in such views.

### Understanding; "Seeing-As".

Wittgenstein's interest in aspect perception or "seeing-as" in the *Philosophical Investigations* and other writings is not restricted to the phenomena of visual perception, although many of the examples he develops and discusses are visual. His wider interest is in the nature of understanding generally and the understanding of meaning in particular<sup>1</sup>. I will return to these wider connections later.

First though, what is meant by seeing an aspect, and how, if at all, is it distinct from ordinary seeing? It is clear that in his discussion of aspects Wittgenstein has in his sights a particular conception of what perception is. This conception is the "common-

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<sup>1</sup> My account of aspect perception draws especially on Stephen Mulhall, *Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* ch.1, and Malcolm Budd, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology* pt. Four. Also helpful was, Paul Johnson, *Wittgenstein on Re-Thinking the Inner*.

sense" model we might have of perception. It also might be labelled the "Empiricist" conception of perception.

What happens when I see a picture- say the duck/rabbit drawing by Jastrow? The "common-sense" conception might describe what happens in these terms; when I see the picture, or anything else, in my mind there is an internal reproduction of the picture or object- an "inner object" which resembles, in terms of shape and colour, the original thing seen<sup>2</sup>. Now, regarding the Jastrow figure, how can we account for the ambiguity of our perpetual experience? I can experience the drawing as a duck and then as a rabbit. How is this to be explained? The first thing to note is that the object perceived, the drawing, is itself unchanged. What appears to change is my experience of it. So it is tempting to say, on the common sense model, that it is the "internal object", my mental *copy* of the original, that has altered. But how could this be? If the inner copy is really a copy of what is there in terms of shape and colour, what is it about it that changes? The reply Wittgenstein suggests is that it is the *organisation* of the internal image that has altered. (P.I. 196e)

Wittgenstein argues, against this picture, first; that it misleadingly conceives all our perceptual experience of the world as necessarily mediated by internal "copies". This is part of his more general attack on the Cartesian inspired conception of the inner. Second; that the account given of aspect perception fails. This is because the claim that the "organisation" of the internal copy changes is mysterious. On the common sense account, what is there to be *seen* is shape, line and colour. It is these features which our "internal copy" is a copy of. So the question is, in what way *could* the organisation of these change? If someone who experiences the Gestalt switch from duck to rabbit is asked to draw what he sees in each case, the drawings will be exactly the same. In what way then has the "organisation" of shape and colour altered? If all there is to be seen is

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<sup>2</sup> Ample *empirical* support for the falsehood of this picture of perception is provided by case studies of those people who have been blind from birth but become sighted through surgery. On the empiricist/common-sense model we would not anticipate difficulties for these patients. However, this was not the outcome, and many such patients, apart from the emotional problems they suffered, found that they could not *learn* to see. See, R. L. Gregory, "Recovery from Blindness; A Case Study" in *Concepts and Mechanisms of Perception*, and Oliver Sacks, "To See and Not to See" in *An Anthropologist on Mars*. Another critical account of the common-sense view, from the perspective of the art historian, is E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*.



shape and colour, the suggestion of an altered organisation makes no sense since these very features seem to be organised in the same way between the two visual experiences. Wittgenstein now considers a second reply that might be made in face of these difficulties. It might be said that the internal copy does not change in any obvious way. Shape and colour remain unaltered. What changes is how I *interpret* my inner picture. On this view, the Gestalt switch is explained in terms of two distinct *interpretations* of what is seen, rather than in terms of a change in what is seen itself either in the object itself or in my internal copy of it.

At this point Wittgenstein claims that his opponent's account cannot do justice to the experience of aspect perception, for the following reason. On that account I perceive the drawing as, let's say, a duck. Or rather, I perceive a certain arrangement of shape and colour which I then *interpret* as being a duck. There is then a two stage movement; first what is seen; second, an interpretation of what is seen. Then when I experience it as a rabbit, I see the same arrangement of shape and colour and this time interpret that arrangement differently. Wittgenstein's objection to this analysis of aspect perception rests on the fact that such a process places the interpretation at one remove from the visual experience. The importance of this fact comes out in the following way; the suggested account seems to allow for the following possibility, that I might, while seeing the drawing as a duck also *notice* that it could be interpreted as a rabbit. Since on this account seeing it as a rabbit just is to *interpret* what is given in perception, I can therefore see it as a duck and as a rabbit *at the same time*. But this is precisely what I cannot do in the case of aspect perception, so the account must be wrong.

The key component of this erroneous picture is that of interpretation. The account goes wrong because it separates the "seeing" element of aspect perception from the "thinking" element which arrives at a characterisation of what is seen. It is because of this separation that the account allows for simultaneous aspect perception. If seeing an aspect is just interpreting something in a given way, as we might interpret a blueprint of a building, or a roadmap, then I can notice rival interpretations *at the same time*. But the entire thrust of Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect perception is to insist that the sharp dichotomy between thinking and seeing is itself one major source of confusion, an erroneous categorisation of the mental;

"...is it a special sort of seeing? Is it a case of both seeing and thinking? Or an amalgam of the two, as I should almost like to say? The question is; *why* does one want to say this? " (P.I.197e)

With the rejection of the suggested “common -sense” model, where are we? The conclusion Wittgenstein argues for is that we have to enlarge our conception of what can be literally “seen”. One fault of the common-sense model was that it restricted the scope of what could be seen to shape and colour, and then got into difficulties over explaining what it is to see an aspect. Instead we should accept that we can literally see more than this model allows. Aspects are not *extrapolations from* what is seen but are themselves literally seen. Similarly, when I recognise a face, notice a resemblance between faces, or see a smile as happy, these are not *conclusions* I arrive at about what I see but features *of* what I see. I see the happiness, I see the resemblance, and so on. In other cases of aspect perception such as listening to music, when I hear a sequence of notes as a melody, as a restatement of a theme or hear it as sad or as plaintive, I hear these qualities in the music. This account has a direct bearing on language also. It is part of Wittgenstein’s project to show that grasping the meaning of a term is not a question of interpreting bare sounds<sup>3</sup>.

When we hear someone utter a sentence, we do not hear a sequence of sounds that we then set to work to interpret; instead, the experience of the meaning of a word is part of what is heard. In this respect, seeing and grasping meaning, as Wittgenstein develops those ideas involve rejecting a common picture of our relation to the world. On what we might term this “Empiricist” picture, we have access to the “empirical” features of the world which our senses deliver to us; bare sound and visual sensation (The “given” as Wilfred Sellars calls it), which the intellect then acts upon. The products of this intellectual activity can only *incorrectly* be ascribed to, or “spread” onto the world, and thought of as properties of something “out there.” This whole picture of our standing in relation to the world has been challenged both within the existentialist tradition, particularly by Heidegger, and more recently within the analytic tradition itself by writers such as John McDowell. I will return to these issues later.<sup>4</sup>

Let us then try to draw out more clearly the key features of aspect perception. First, we can sum up much of what we have been saying so far in the claim that the perception of an aspect is not an *inference from* what is seen but is itself *what* is seen. This leads to a

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<sup>3</sup> Another feature of Davidson’s philosophy crops up here, since he thinks understanding *is* a question of the interpretation of bare sounds. I return to this topic in the final chapter.

<sup>4</sup> In the final chapter.



second point; seeing-as is not simply a “belief *that*”. If it were an inference, seeing-as would be plausibly thought of as a belief<sup>5</sup>. But it is not. There is no problem in entertaining different beliefs simultaneously, but there is an impossibility attached to seeing the duck aspect and the rabbit aspect simultaneously. We can sum up this point by saying that seeing-as is non-epistemic. This comes out very clearly for example in the Muller-Lyer illusion. In this illusion we see two equidistant lines with arrowheads at each end, but with the arrows pointing inward on the first line and outward on the second. The effect is to make one line appear longer than the other. Now although we can see one line as longer than the other, we need not *believe* that this is the case. We may indeed believe the opposite. But if I do believe they are the same length, this belief may have no tendency at all to make them *look* the same length.

Both of the above points are made about perception by David Hamlyn in a discussion of Helmholtz’ theory of perception<sup>6</sup>. Helmholtz tried to develop a theory that would explain how the perceived colour of a surface would alter depending on the colour of the surface it was placed next to. He attempted to show that there was an unconscious inference made by the subject, the conclusion of which was a belief about the colour of the surface. But how, asks Hamlyn, could a *belief* change the way things *look*? It is in any case clear that the content of the visual experience goes beyond belief. A blind person may have some inferential procedure for arriving at the correct beliefs about the colour of surfaces, but this is compatible with their having no acquaintance with colour, with their not really knowing what colour is.

In the Muller-Lyer illusion, I see things in a certain way. It is clear that here and no doubt quite generally, there is some explanation to be given of how this happens in terms of processes in the brain, nervous system and visual cortex. Indeed, it would be mysterious if there were not. But the two points made so far still stand. Even if there *were* something we might call an unconscious inference at the level of neural networks, it could not merely be an inference to a *belief*, as noted above. If it were instead an inference to the perception of an aspect, say, it would still be the case that the perceptual experience cannot be characterised as an inference *from what is seen*. In this respect

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<sup>5</sup> We may think of Sack’s anthropologist (previous chapter) as an illustration. Her problem was not that she didn’t *believe* the right things - she explicitly says she can *infer* and interpret the meaning of gestures correctly- but that there was something she couldn’t *see*.

<sup>6</sup> David Hamlyn, “Unconscious Inference and Judgement in Perception”, in *Learning, Perception and the Self*.

Wittgenstein can perfectly well allow inferences at the level of computational processes and the mechanisms of perception. That does not upset his denial of an inference from what is seen. For what the person sees is the aspect itself. He does not “see” a bare empirical entity from which he then infers a detached interpretation. And equally it is clear enough that the visual experience is something apart from a belief.<sup>7</sup>

But is there *no* connection between aspect perception and belief? When I see the duck/rabbit is there *nothing* I believe about it? It is one of the main claims made by Roger Scruton in his discussion of aspect perception<sup>8</sup> that it does *not* involve belief. In a review of the book William Charlton objected to Scruton’s insistence that aesthetic judgement, because it involves aspect perception, is “unasserted”. He agrees with Scruton that seeing the duck/rabbit as a duck or as a rabbit does not involve believing that it is a duck or a rabbit. But, he says, that is beside the point, because what I believe is not that it is a duck or a rabbit, which would be obviously false, but that it is a *picture* of a duck or a rabbit. And so there is after all a belief.

While this is correct, it does not affect the main thrust of the account of aspect perception; we can accept that there may be beliefs which we form *on the basis of* what we see while denying that we can characterise the visual experience itself in terms of belief.<sup>9</sup> Scruton’s point that aesthetic judgement is “unasserted” because it involves aspects is complicated by the fact that the aspects relevant to aesthetic experience are examples of what Wittgenstein called “secondary sense”. When I hear the music as sad, it is not *literally* sad since the properties of music have nothing in common with the usual, literal objects we describe as sad. Aesthetic description therefore involves “secondary senses” of these terms.

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<sup>7</sup> This raises the question: at which level is there understanding? - at the “computational” level or the level of *experience*? There is a common assumption, traceable to Plato, that understanding must lie at the level of the underlying principles, rules or computations. But even if we assume that there *are* such rules at that (“subdoxastic”) level, known “tacitly”, it is *in experience* that understanding is realised. In following a rule (see below) there is no *procedure* which the subject is using, no rule he is actively following. His judgements might be generated by some subdoxastic computational process, but it is at the level of *experience* that he “sees” what the correct judgement is.

<sup>8</sup> Scruton, *Art and Imagination*.

<sup>9</sup> To make the point concrete in the case of emotions, we may add that although an emotion involves seeing things a certain way, and not just beliefs, we may of course believe things *on the basis of* how they seem. If something appears to be humiliating I may believe that it is. Equally, though, in the case of phobias, say, I may not have a belief based on appearances.



A third point has been implicit in much of the above. What we grasp when we see an aspect is only to be grasped through that experience. Since seeing-as is better thought of as an ability, when we put this point together with the point just made about what is grasped in the experience of aspects, it seems that those who are unable to see aspects are missing out on some kind of cognitive grasp of something. Wittgenstein himself coined the term “aspect blind”<sup>10</sup> to describe such people. He imagined people who were oblivious to aspects of meaning, who heard words without hearing them with the aspects of their meaning.

But such cases are not merely fictional. The neurologist Oliver Sacks<sup>11</sup> records the misfortunes of Dr. P. who suffered from a form of visual agnosia. Dr. P. was regularly unable to recognise everyday objects and people, even members of his close family. He could describe well enough their features, the *elements* of their faces, but seemed incapable of grasping the face as a whole. Equally, when given a glove to identify he was unable to do so, although he could describe its shape, texture and component parts, even offering educated guesses as to its possible use. Although his vision was in these ways unimpaired there was something he was not seeing. Dr. P. is uncannily like Wittgenstein’s “aspect-blind”.

The case of Dr. P. also raises another question; is the perception of aspects involved in all our visual experience, or only in certain areas? And if the latter, can we say in a general way which things involve seeing-as and which don’t? In Dr. P’s case, although he was unable to see some aspects, he could easily recognise features and elements of objects. This question has provoked some debate. Before turning to this question, let us briefly connect what we have said about aspect perception so far with what we said about emotions in the previous chapter.

We have made the following three claims so far;

- (a) that seeing-as does not involve an inference.
- (b) that it is not reducible to belief.
- (c) that it offers a grasp of something not accessible by other means.

These claims fit very neatly with what we concluded about emotions; that they do not require beliefs and that the nature of emotional experience is given quite apart from belief. Further, we mentioned the possibility that emotional experience might offer a

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<sup>10</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* (213-214)

<sup>11</sup> Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat..*

grasp of something which is denied to those incapable of the emotion. It is worth noting at this point that Wittgenstein's notion of seeing-as is very similar to Aristotle's treatment of "*phantasia*"<sup>12</sup>. Both describe the intentional content of experience which is distinct from belief and which is related to the imagination. Furthermore, Aristotle's conception of emotion<sup>13</sup> makes use of the notion of *phantasia* to describe the cognitive content of the emotion. The account of emotion I am suggesting using the notion of seeing-as is prefigured then in Aristotle<sup>14</sup>. I return to the notion of *phantasia* in the final chapter.

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<sup>12</sup> On the comparison, see Martha Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*, Essay Five. On the concept of Phantasia, see M. Schofield, "Aristotle on the Imagination" and Dorothea Frede, "The Cognitive Role of Phantasia in Aristotle", both in Rorty, (ed), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*.

<sup>13</sup> In *De Anima*.

<sup>14</sup> The issue of Aristotle's view of emotion and that of the Stoics is discussed later. Although the substance of the account of emotion suggested here can be found in Aristotle, his treatment of emotion in particular amounts to some scattered remarks. *De Anima* offers no detailed analysis, while the *Rhetoric* does not mention the connection with phantasia, but, as might be expected from a *manual* concentrates on more practical issues concerning emotion. As the secondary literature makes clear (see n.10 for references) the concept of *phantasia* itself has been given a variety of different interpretations.



## Is All Seeing “Seeing-as”?

In Wittgenstein’s examples, he discusses seeing the duck rabbit picture as a duck or as a rabbit, hearing a musical sequence as the statement or reworking of a theme, hearing it as plaintive, seeing a Maltese cross as a white cross on a black background or vice versa, seeing a line drawing of a cube as a three dimensional object facing in different directions, and so on. The question arises whether *all* our perception is a matter of aspect perception. Why could Sack’s Dr. P. see some features of an object without difficulty but not others? When I see the Maltese cross as a cross, am I perceiving an aspect? Equally, when I see everyday objects, does my perception involve aspects? Some of the things Wittgenstein himself says about this suggest that his answer is that they do not. He writes for example,

“It would have made as little sense for me to say “Now I am seeing it as....” as to say at the sight of a knife and fork “Now I am seeing this as a knife and fork”. This expression would not be understood.- Any more than: “Now it’s a fork” or “It can be a fork too”.

One doesn’t “*take*” what one knows as the cutlery at a meal *for* cutlery; any more than one ordinarily tries to move one’s mouth as one eats, or aims at moving it.”

(P.I. Pt.2, 195e)

This seems to imply that in everyday perceptions there is no aspect perception involved. But why? Certainly, we do not make the kind of statements Wittgenstein imagines, and if we did, as he remarks, they would not be understood. But that in itself doesn’t seem to show that seeing-as is not involved. Or is Wittgenstein driving at a slightly different point in the remarks above? In his discussion of aspects he sharply distinguishes between “continuous” aspect perception and the “*dawning*” of an aspect;

“And I must distinguish between the “continuous seeing” of an aspect and the “dawning” of an aspect .

The picture might have been shewn me, and I never have seen anything but a rabbit in it.” (P.I. Pt. 2, 194e)

So, the suggestion here may be that if an aspect is perceived continuously - as it may be in the case of everyday objects- and does not “dawn”, but is my “natural” mode of perception of it, this in some way does not involve an aspect. But why should the “dawning” of an aspect be necessary if there is to be an aspect at all? Couldn’t there be aspects involved, without a *shift* in aspects? After all, it seems that what the “Gestalt switch” reveals is that there *was* the perception of an aspect going on all the time, but we were just unaware of it.

But there is an alternative way to construe Wittgenstein’s remarks here. Instead of making the point so far suggested, he may be making a “*grammatical*” remark about the concept of seeing an aspect. In other words, the notion of “seeing an aspect” is that of an experience. But what are the “grammatical” features (in Wittgenstein’s sense) of the concept of an experience? For one thing, it has *duration*. If I am in pain, say, I can say roughly when the pain began and how long it lasted. Similarly, when I notice an aspect, I can say when this occurred and perhaps roughly how long the vivid novelty of the perception lasted. Continuous aspect perception is not an experience in this sense. The question “when did you first see the fork as a fork”? in normal circumstances is senseless. There is no noticeable experience. The point then would not be that perception does not *involve* aspects, but that it would make no sense in these contexts to *say* that it does. If this is Wittgenstein’s point, it is still compatible with the thought that the perception of normal objects does involve aspects. There is no difficulty, for example, in contriving imaginary circumstances in which I cannot make out the identity of some object, in which only after some effort does its identity dawn on me. “Now I see”, I exclaim, “It’s a fork!”.

If Wittgenstein himself does not restrict the role of seeing-as in perception, are there other good reasons for doing so? It might be thought that little hangs on this question. However it has been the subject of disagreement between at least two writers ; Peter Strawson and Roger Scruton<sup>15</sup> The issue that divides them is the role of seeing-as in perception and its relation to the imagination and the will. These topics are of importance when we come to emotions. If “seeing-as” involves imagination and is to

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Strawson, “Imagination and Perception”, in *Freedom and Resentment*, and Scruton, (Op.Cit.). Also relevant are Hide Ishiguro, “Imagination”, Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, and David Hamlyn, “Imagination” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* , S. Guttenplan (ed.).



some extent open to the will, then these will be important facts for any account of the education of the emotions to bear in mind. Below I will describe first Strawson's point of view and then Scruton's.

## Imagination.

Strawson argues that *all* perception involves "seeing-as" while Scruton wishes to restrict the perception of aspects to a smaller subset of perceptual experiences. Strawson argues first of all that all perception involves bringing experience under concepts. This was, for example, Kant's view. Next, he argues that this feat is achieved by the mental faculty we call *imagination*. This view of the function of imagination is not new; it is adhered to by both Hume and Kant, who elaborate theories of this mechanism by which experience is brought under concepts. Lastly, Strawson claims that "seeing-as" is simply a striking illustration of these facts about perceptual experience. Since, therefore, all perception involves the bringing to bear of concepts, all perception involves seeing-as. . For Kant, in the First Critique, sensory perception of the world alone would lack order; it must be organised - and thereby transformed- by being brought under concepts, and this unification is achieved through the *imagination*. Now in both Kant and Hume imagination is involved in bringing particular sensations under concepts. This is the main point of similarity with "seeing-as". That phenomenon also involves shaping or organising visual experience according to concepts- seeing x *as* y where y is a general concept, such as car, table, tree, fork. One potential source of difficulty in the claim that seeing-as involves bringing experience under concepts is that there remains a lack of clarity about what a *concept* is<sup>16</sup>. It seems clear that "table", "face", "tree" are all

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<sup>16</sup> There are several possible sources of anxiety about concepts; first, there is scepticism regarding what it is to *grasp* a concept and whether we *can* legitimately speak of concepts organising our experience at all. This kind of scepticism is found in Kripke's work on rule-following, to be discussed in a later section. Secondly, there is the question being raised here, whether all concepts are universals or whether there can be concepts which are *particular*. Kant's aesthetic theory involves the claim that a correct grasp of aesthetic objects is not mediated by concepts. One way of making sense of this claim would be to show how aesthetic understanding does not employ *universal* concepts; this would allow room for the

concepts, and that they shape and inform our experience. But what about perceiving a familiar face? The concept “face” is only one part of my experience, here. In addition there is the *particular* face that I recognise. Is *that* also the exercise of a concept? If so, concepts *need not* be general<sup>17</sup>.

This point is related to a second usage that Kant makes of the concept of imagination, this time in the Critique of Judgement. There Kant argues that aesthetic appreciation is distinct from other forms of understanding in that it is freed from the tyranny of concepts. Yet, he claims, when we experience works of art, they are nevertheless *understood* and we grasp the identity of the work without concepts. This is achieved through the imagination. This claim drives him towards a formalism about the appreciation of artworks according to which we are most involved in their appreciation when we focus on formal patterns.

So far then, we have seen that Hume and Kant believe that imagination is involved in bringing visual sensations under concepts, and that a similar role can be made out in the case of seeing-as. But is it informative to claim that this process is performed by a faculty called *imagination*? Does the claim, in other words, make it any more perspicuous what actually occurs? Why introduce a vague and itself mysterious concept to do the work? In part the answer to this question is that it *is* rather mysterious how the process of bringing something under a concept works. A natural suggestion might be that we note resemblances between objects and thus naturally “abstract” concepts from experience. However, this account of concept acquisition is notoriously flawed<sup>18</sup>. Since there are *always* resemblances between objects, including ones which do not fall under the same concept, application of the concept requires a grasp of which resemblances are relevant. This mistaken empiricist view of concept- acquisition is a product of the general empiricist account of perception which we have seen Wittgenstein attack above. But it generates an equally mistaken view of imagination also. It is the view that imagination always involves a *mental image*.

For Hume, when I imagine something, I have an inner image (an “idea”) which is a faint *copy* of some original visual impression. Hume assumes then, that to imagine something is to have a kind of internal image or picture. This kind of account of what it

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deployment of *particular* concepts, while distancing aesthetic interest from other kinds of understanding in the way that Kant required.

<sup>17</sup> This issue is explored further in the final chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* for criticism of this “abstractionist” view.



is to imagine something has been attacked on many counts, most famously perhaps by Gilbert Ryle<sup>19</sup>. Is it true, for example, that imagining differs from original perception of something only by being less vivid? Ryle's example of smell illustrates the difficulties of this idea. When I imagine a smell-say, of coffee- I am not smelling *anything*- not even less vividly- in the usual way. Whatever it is that I do, the smell I imagine is not in the same medium as normal smells. Ryle goes further, however, by claiming that when I imagine something- a building, or a person's face, or a tune- there is *no* internal image at all. Ryle claims that imagining is a kind of pretending. However this account barely makes sense. When I imagine a person's face, or a smell, or a tune, there need be no behaviour involved. But if that is so, in what sense am I pretending? The notion of a pretence seems to require something public. In the absence of behaviour, as Hide Ishiguro<sup>20</sup> asked in response to Ryle, aren't we driven inward to some mental occurrence?

But we needn't go as far as Ryle in order to reject the "Mental Image" theory of Imagination. According to that view, when I imagine, say, my home town, what makes the mental images I have images of my home town, is that they *resemble* it. But we saw above that resemblance was an inadequate basis for the derivation of concepts. It is also an inadequate basis for any account of representation<sup>21</sup>. That a picture or an image represents something else cannot be a matter of its resembling it, for reasons we have already considered. And in just the same way, imagining my home town is not just a question of having mental pictures that resemble it.

According to Wittgenstein, what is left out of all these accounts is the role of intention and the perspective of the person imagining or representing. If I imagine certain images under the description, "My Home Town", then this gives them a reference. In short, imagination, where it does involve mental images, must involve those images being brought under a certain concept or aspect. So there is a common thread which runs through the empiricist concept of seeing to the account of imagination. Wittgenstein writes;

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<sup>19</sup> Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*.

<sup>20</sup> Ishiguro, (Op.Cit.).

<sup>21</sup> A famous discussion of this issue is Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*.

“The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept “I am now seeing it as....” is akin to “I am now having *this* image.”

Doesn't it take imagination to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one is perceiving something in so hearing it”.

(P.I. pt.2. 213e)

In both the case of imagining something and hearing the music there is something perceived, but it is perceived *as* something. The second reason why aspect perception is akin to the imagination is given immediately after this;

“Seeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will. There is such an order as “Imagine *this*”, and also: “Now see the figure like *this*”; but not: “Now see this leaf green.””

(P.I. pt.2. 213e.)

The point, then, is that both the act of imagining something and the perception of an aspect are under the control of the will. But is this always true of aspects? I can certainly *try* to see the duck aspect but perhaps I will not succeed. But Wittgenstein's point seems to be that it at least makes sense to *try*, and to that extent it is subject to the will. And further, not all seeing is like *this*. Nobody could *try* to see a leaf as green, it just is green.

This is Scruton's basic argument against Strawson; only if something is under the control of the will in this sense can it be called an aspect. And so by this criterion, not all perception involves aspects, since it makes no sense to say, for example, “Now see this as green!”. Is this argument conclusive? First, we should note that what it makes sense to try to see something *as*, is not fixed. Does it make sense to try to see a glove as a glove? Perhaps not much more than trying to see a leaf as green. But while this is so for most people, it is not so for Sacks' patient Dr.P. He could not see a glove as a glove, a flower as a flower, his foot as his foot, or his wife's head as his wife's head. Since Scruton's and Wittgenstein's point is that to involve seeing-as it must make sense to *try* to see x as y, what it makes sense for most people to try to see is merely an anthropological fact. But why should any fact of this sort indicate whether or not aspects are involved?

But what does seem to be true is that what for some people can require effort and imagination, can for others be natural and effortless. This seems to be true also between



generations and from place to place and culture to culture<sup>22</sup>. What in one culture or generation may require imagination in another may be automatic or obvious.

But even granting the above, doesn't Wittgenstein have a point; surely it doesn't make sense to try to see something as green or hear something as loud or feel something as hard? Surely at this level, aspects are not involved? Even Dr. P could cope with things at this level. Even here though our perceptions are perhaps not brute, but are conceptualised. This at least is the argument of John McDowell.<sup>23</sup>

It would also be misleading to think of seeing-as as somehow just a product of the will. In one sense it is quite the opposite, as Wittgenstein himself notes, "Think for example of certain involuntary interpretations that we may give to one or another passage in a piece of music. We say; This interpretation forces itself upon us."

(R.P.P.vol 1. 22)

And it is equally true that when I succeed in seeing the rabbit aspect something "clicks" and the aspect *forces* itself upon me<sup>24</sup>. But at the same time Wittgenstein was convinced that the connection between aspects and the will meant that what we learn from them does not teach us anything about the world;

"It is essential that one can say "Now see it like this" and "Form an image of...".For this hangs together with the aspect's not teaching us anything about the external world."

(R.P.P.vol 1. 899)

The point here seems to be that since aspects can be seen at will they cannot "really" be part of the external world. But this argument is not persuasive. Because we can learn to perceive some feature of the world and our perception is in certain ways subject to our control, why *should* it follow that the feature is not real?<sup>25</sup>

Up to now then, I have tried mainly to focus on criticisms of the empiricist account of imagination. But if imagination is not what that account implies, what then is it? Certainly, if imagination is involved in seeing an aspect, as I have claimed, it does not involve just having an internal image/copy. Nor does it involve simply noting resemblances. The range of phenomena that involve imagination would include, for

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<sup>22</sup> For example, perhaps old silent or black and white films now have an appearance to most young people which they have to *overcome* through imagination.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*. McDowell's argument is Kantian in inspiration, like Strawson's.

<sup>24</sup> In this respect it is like belief; belief cannot be a product of the will, as Descartes' mistaken arguments to the contrary ( in *The Meditations*) reveal.

<sup>25</sup> I return to this question in the final chapter.

example, recognising a caricature of a face, hearing a melody as plaintive, seeing an action as selfish, coming to take pride in something and grasping arithmetic functions such as addition. All these are examples of understanding and all involve coming to *see* something *as* something. This imaginative ability might be characterised as a kind of “leap”, since it is precisely not the result of following a rule or procedure.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to offer any more precise description of this ability, but we may take some comfort from the fact that philosophers without exception continue to find the imagination difficult to characterise, beyond saying what it is not<sup>26</sup>.

There is also another feature implicit in the account given so far of aspect perception which needs to be brought out, to which I now turn. This is what I will term- following other writers- the “particularism” of understanding<sup>27</sup>. This will provide us with a further criticism of Davidson’s account of emotions (in chapter one).

## Particularism.

Consider the experience of listening to a piece of music. We may hear it as exuberant or as melancholy, as anguished or as expressing longing. In one way, what we hear is simply a sequence of notes or chords each of which can be given a musical description such as “C Major”, “Diminished seventh” and so on. In musical terms each of these units has the same value wherever it occurs: C Major is always C Major. But what we *hear* is not invariable in this way. How we hear a note or a chord depends in large part on the other notes and chords which surround it. Although for the purposes of musical analysis we can break down what is heard into a sequence of notes, the unit of musical understanding tends to be more than single notes. This familiar fact reveals something

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<sup>26</sup> For example, a recent attempt is David Hamlyn’s helpful discussion in Guttenplan (ed.) *A Companion to The Philosophy of Mind*.

<sup>27</sup> Among writers who describe themselves as “Particularists” or who hold views of this sort are, Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons*; Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity*, and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness and Love’s Knowledge*. These writers focus on ethical understanding, while I apply the account to understanding in general. However the seeds of this extension are already present in their accounts. See especially Dancy’s account of “resultance”, discussed below.



about the relationship between *aspects* and the lower-level elements of which they consist.

Take again the example we briefly considered in the previous section, that of recognising a face. A face is composed of various elements; single features such as nose, lips, cheek bones and so on. In the perception of a face, these elements unite to form a whole, just as the musical elements combine to make a melody, and the same point can be made about the “value” of each of the elements. The same single element may have a different value in a different context, combined with different elements. Wittgenstein makes the same point in his discussion of an “arbitrary” cipher;

“I can imagine some arbitrary cipher...to be a strictly correct letter of some foreign alphabet. Or again, to be a faultily written one.. or typical childish awkwardness, or like the flourishes in a legal document... And I can see it in various aspects according to the fiction *I surround it with*. And here there is a close kinship with “experiencing the meaning of a word.” (P. I. Pt.2. 210e my italics)

Here the context is an imaginary one, but the fictional *background* alters the aspect under which we see the cipher. And in the context of understanding language, we experience the meaning of a word- for example, “bank”- differently depending on the *context* in which we find it.<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein gives further examples. If I see a familiar piece of furniture out of its customary environment, it takes on a new appearance (R.P.P. 1. 339). If I see a lion, not at the zoo, but in the middle of the road, the lion does not “*look*” the same in both cases<sup>29</sup>. If these points are granted then we can say the following. First, that the relationship between an aspect and the elements which compose it is not invariable. An element does not have a fixed value, but its value depends on the other elements with which it interacts in a given context. Second, the

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<sup>28</sup> In ways such as these, the experience of *meaning* is like seeing-as.

<sup>29</sup> This may seem to go beyond even what has been claimed so far. Until now I have claimed that the joy of a smile, say, is actually *perceived* rather than inferred or interpreted. But while it is one thing to claim that such a quality is seen, it is another to say that the context itself *alters* what is seen. After all, there is not obviously a new *quality* here at all. But this is no stranger than the musical example in which how we hear a note or chord alters. In any case the general point is that the meaning or content of the whole is not *reducible* to the meaning of its elements. In the lion example, the context is certainly an *element* and so can influence the whole.

perceiver need know nothing of the elements underlying an aspect. I can recognise a face without being able to *say* which features give me this impression, and I can hear music as melancholy without being able to account for the features of the music which account for this perception. In a different context Jonathan Dancy makes a similar point. He is discussing a relationship between a property and the features which give rise to it, which he describes as “resultance”. He writes;

“Sometimes there is only one way for an object to get a resultant property, as in the case of squareness. Squareness results from the same packet of properties every time. But there are different ways of getting to be dangerous, and different tables are tables in virtue of different properties...As a relationship resultance occurs at many levels; the properties in virtue of which this action is wrong may include its unkindness, which itself results from further properties. So there is such a thing as a resultance tree. But it should be clear that this tree is restricted in its application to the particular case...But it is important to notice that the epistemology of resultance need not follow the metaphysics. We might take it that if one property results from others, we cannot discern that property directly, but must work to it through a recognition of the presence of the properties from which it here results. But the epistemological direction has in fact no need to follow the metaphysical one...one can certainly notice that something is a table first, before one takes in the particular features that its tableness results from.”  
(Moral Reasons pp.73-4)

Dancy’s point that we can be aware of the “higher” level property before or without being directly aware of the properties it derives from, fits the case of aspects very well. We see x as y without necessarily being able to give an account of the features which are responsible. The real importance of this point is the following. We tend to assume that understanding involves applying terms, concepts and rules. And equally, it is part of our common sense picture that these terms are applied from the ground “up”. This is the notion of the “procedure” of bringing things under concepts and rules which we mentioned above. So, we assume there are criteria for the application of these concepts-criteria which we *use*. The upshot of this picture is that first, we assume that understanding is general in nature. That is, it involves the application of general rules from case to case. If an action is judged wrong or selfish, for example, that is because it satisfies some *general* criterion for wrong or selfish actions. This is precisely the picture



that we met in chapter one in the form of Davidson's account of emotion; that there must be a universal proposition from which *particular* judgements can be *inferred*.

But Dancy's point is that the properties underlying the wrongness or selfishness are not always the same. The "Generalist" picture can be traced back to Plato<sup>30</sup>, who argues that real understanding is *episteme*, general in nature, while the opposing view can be found in Aristotle<sup>31</sup> who claims that rules hold at best only in most cases, and that what virtue requires is not the grasp of rules but the refinement of *perception* (see next chapter). What such perception involves is *salience*- this is common to both Wittgenstein's account of aspect perception and the account of emotional seeing outlined in chapter two. This account of seeing also provides us with a reply to another charge- that of intuitionism.

Intuitionism as an ethical doctrine is associated with the work of Ross and Moore<sup>32</sup>, but the accusation has also been levelled at Aristotle. One of the main objections to intuitionism is that it posits the existence of mysterious non-natural properties, which are then equally mysteriously "perceived" by some unspecified faculty- though certainly not by the ordinary senses. The present account shows how we can avoid the obscurities of such a view while remaining able to explain why there *can* be "features" which not everyone sees.

At this point the Generalist may make the following reply; he may admit that individuals need have no *explicit* or *conscious* grasp of rules or general principles, and certainly need not be actively following any rule or procedure to generate particular judgements. This much of the particularist claim, he may concede, is correct. Nevertheless, he may insist, this does not show that such formulations or rules do not

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<sup>30</sup> That is, to Plato's insistence that his interlocutors tell him what justice, or virtue *as such* are, rather than offer examples. The assumption is that real knowledge consists in the grasp of general principles. Plato generally thinks that any discipline that amounts to a body of knowledge is a *techne*, and a key feature of a *techne* is that it is based on a body of principles and rules. Philosophy is a *techne* in this sense, and so amounts to knowledge (*episteme*), while rhetoric and the arts are not. I return to these issues in the final chapter.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. N. E. 1142a 23-30. For interpretations of Aristotle along these lines, see for example, Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, and "The Discernment of Perception; an Aristotelian Conception of Rationality", in *Love's Knowledge*; also Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* Ch. 2, and *Making a Necessity of Virtue* Ch. 6. As Sherman emphasises, for Aristotle, correct perception is *emotional*, not cool and intellectual.

<sup>32</sup> W. D. Ross, *The Right and The Good* and G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*.



exist, and it does not show that they are not present and *operative* in the individual, although at a *subdoxastic* level. An obvious analogy might be with linguistic competence. We can all make judgements about what is grammatical and what is not; we are capable, for instance, of embedding question-forms in assertive sentences, and of spotting mistaken attempts to do so. Yet few of us know the complicated linguistic rules which govern these procedures. Chomsky, the most famous exponent of this view, claims that despite our ignorance of these rules at the conscious level, they *must* nevertheless be present and operating, known “tacitly” and generated by our universal grammar.

By analogy then, when I experience something *as* something, I do not *need* to know the rules describing the way a concept “results” from lower level elements. When Gabriel judges something to be shameful, he need not be able to state explicitly what the general proposition is on which his judgement is based. But that doesn’t mean that at a lower level he isn’t “using” one. In short - so this reply goes- particularism is only superficially true. Real understanding, however, must be *general* in nature.

In replying to this objection, we can make several points. First, we should accept that there are always neural processes at work when I have perceptual and auditory experience, when I see the Muller-Lyer illusion, when I catch the ball as it bounces off the wall, when I see the duck/rabbit and when I speak in my native tongue. But we can question the claim that these computations amount to rules which are being *followed*. This is to attribute intentionality to a level where there isn’t any<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, the *point* of referring to the lower level computations is supposed to be that it removes the *puzzle* left by the absence of explicit *conscious* understanding, and does so by locating understanding at this lower, computational, level. But why should we accept that there *is* a puzzle at the higher level? After all, only if we *already* accept that understanding must be of a certain form, namely that of general principles or rules, explicitly held, will their absence at the higher level leave a puzzle which has to be explained. But what argument has been offered in support of *that* assumption? So far, none. Rather it is being supposed that there *must be* such rules or computations, since what else *could* account for understanding?<sup>34</sup> But this is a big assumption. And it begins

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<sup>33</sup> Searle ( in *The Rediscovery of the Mind*) refers to this as the “Homunculus Fallacy”.

<sup>34</sup> Here cognitive science is taken to provide a model for the generalist. Those investigating say, the visual system, aim to show how our experience is underwritten by a computational system in some neural medium. A general model of this sort is Fodor’s *Language of Thought*. But these assumptions- even for



to look an unreasonably strong one when we focus, for example, on our experience of music. Does it really look plausible that what goes on when I learn to understand music is that my neural/cognitive systems codify my experience in some way<sup>35</sup>? We have already admitted that there will be neural processes involved in my experience. The second question we can raise - conceding for the moment that there is a puzzle which needs explaining- is whether such appeals to neural processes in fact *provide* the necessary explanations; do they remove the puzzle that we were allegedly faced with?

Here I think the answer is “no”. For if the claim is that my understanding of music, say, *just is* the neural computations involved, then this account is open to Searle’s well known “Chinese Room” argument, according to which no amount of syntactic encoding or computation is *sufficient* for understanding or semantics. We might put the point by saying that understanding always has a *phenomenology*. In a sense then, when we ask where my understanding is *located*, the computational model encourages us to think of it as lying at the lower, neural level. But if Searle is right, there *is* no understanding there, and we are thrown back to the higher level. It is at *that* level- the level of experience- that I have understanding. So, for example, even if there is a neural process underlying my recognition of a *face* as a caricature of someone I know<sup>36</sup>, the *content* of my understanding seems ineliminably tied to the experience of seeing it that way; the understanding, we might say, is *in the experience*. So even if we have to posit general computations (a la Davidson) the real understanding consists in my (conscious) *experience* of this particular situation. Therefore, since the experience is particular, so is understanding.

These replies, I think are effective against both the supposition that generalism is the only adequate explanation there *could* be (i.e., that without resort to it, we are left with an insoluble puzzle), and the claim that it *is* in fact explanatory (i.e. that it removes the puzzle). If these points are correct, then generalism is simply a misguided assumption

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*these* cognitive systems- have been disputed (For example, by John Searle, *The Rediscovery of The Mind*). Generally, even in these cases, it is far from clear that underlying rules and computations is the *only* or even the *best* explanation we can offer. (see Searle, Ch.10).

<sup>35</sup> And what are they supposed to be encoding? When I hear the second movement of the Eroica symphony as brooding in tone, is this to be seen as the result of some neural encoding which is *equivalent* to the (aural) judgement that the music is brooding in tone? But how *could* a neural encoding be equivalent to that experience?

<sup>36</sup> Which, let us concede, there must be.

about the nature of understanding. The present section then, has attempted to show how we can see in Wittgenstein's account of seeing-as the seeds of a particularist account of understanding. In the next section, we can see this view further embodied in his views about rule-following, which is also a critique of various aspects of generalism.

## Understanding (b); Rule-Following.

What *is* the problem of rule-following? "Rule-following" refers to the consistent application of a rule or concept. Wittgenstein's discussion concentrates on arithmetical rules such as "add 2", but it is relevant to a much wider range of phenomena. Correct and consistent application of a term or rule is a necessary feature of language since any language embodies a notion of normativity or correctness, enabling us to distinguish correct from incorrect applications of a term. Without such a notion language would be impossible. The problem of rule-following is to account for this normativity.

The problem is not primarily the problem of how I know that somebody is following a rule in the way I am<sup>37</sup>, but is rather the "constitutive" problem of what consistent application of the rule *consists* in.

We may be tempted, in trying to explain this, to assume that when I grasp a rule I grasp "in a flash" its *essential* application; that is, I somehow grasp how it is to be applied here *and in all other hypothetical cases*. But how is this possible? Wittgenstein offers the analogy of remembering a tune;

"I want to remember a tune and it escapes me; suddenly I say "Now I know it" and I sing it. What was it like to suddenly know it? Surely it can't have occurred to me *in its entirety* at that moment!- Perhaps you will say: "It's a particular feeling, as if it were *there*."- but *is* it there?" (P.I. Pt. 1, 184)

Again, the problem Wittgenstein perceives here is that we fall naturally into a misleading picture of what understanding consists in, just as his discussion of seeing-as is directed at a misleading picture of seeing. In the background of these discussions is an equally misleading picture of meaning and understanding meaning. One thing they seem

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<sup>37</sup> Which would make it a version of the problem of Other Minds.



to share is the error of assuming that what is crucial is some inner entity or process which is available to introspection. In the case just quoted he is arguing that “knowing the tune” does not consist in some internal copy of the tune.

But the same error crops up when we try to explain what grasping the meaning of a term or the application of a rule consists in;

“It’s as if we could grasp the whole use of a word in a flash.”- And that is just what we say we do. That is to say: we sometimes describe what we do in these words. But there is nothing astonishing, nothing queer, about what happens. It becomes queer when we are led to think that the future development must in some way already be present in the act of grasping the use and yet isn’t present.” (P.I. Pt. 1, 197)

Equally when I say, “Let’s play a game of chess” I don’t need to have all the rules of chess passing through my mind. The error Wittgenstein argues against is not the assumption that we do *know* how to correctly apply a term or rule, *or* that somehow I grasp this in a flash, but the *explanation* of this in terms of some inner occurrence, such as the coming before my mind of all possible applications (an impossibility in any case, with arithmetic rules, whose applications are infinite).

Instead of the picture of all possible *occurrences* coming before my mind when I grasp a rule, can we not say that what I grasp is an *interpretation* of the rule or concept? This is an intuitively plausible idea perhaps, but Wittgenstein rejects it. The reason is that (P.I.198) *whatever* I do can be made to accord with the rule on some interpretation. Interpretations do not fix the application, since an interpretation is itself like a sign whose meaning is not fixed. We then face a regress. But if this is right, how do we know how to apply terms?

Saul Kripke’s well-known treatment of Wittgenstein’s discussion<sup>38</sup> concludes with a sceptical paradox and a sceptical solution to the paradox. The paradox arises from the kinds of points just made; that any proposed *explanation* of rule-following fails. We seem then to have no account to give of the supposed normativity of language use. Kripke’s solution relies on an interpretation of some arguments of Wittgenstein’s

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<sup>38</sup> Saul Kripke, *On Rules and Private Language*. Kripke’s account is discussed and criticised in Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning*; Paul Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations”, *Mind* 1990; Malcolm Budd, “Wittgenstein on Meaning, Interpretation and Rules” *Synthese* 1984; Crispin Wright, “Kripke’s Account of the Argument Against Private Language” *Journal of Philosophy* 1984.

concerning the role of the community and its practices. Kripke suggests that since we can offer no account of the truth conditions for the applications of terms, we should shift to the weaker notion of assertability-conditions. In this way, what the community says is a correct application *is* a correct application. But there can be no appeal to anything beyond the “way we go on”. It is generally agreed, and was suspected by Kripke himself, that his conclusion may not be Wittgenstein’s. It is worth briefly going over Kripke’s arguments and seeing where his conclusions might differ from Wittgenstein’s.

## Kripke.

Take the rule “add 2”. What might following such a rule consist in? Kripke considers three possible answers to this question, which he thinks taken together exhaust the possibilities, and finds all three unacceptable. The three possible accounts of what my correctly applying the rule might consist in are as follows; (a) my actual computations, (b) my past inner experiences, (c) my dispositions to use the sign. Let us take each of these in turn.

Could it be that correctly following the rule consists in simply getting the answers right? No. This answer follows from the point made by Wittgenstein that a given set of (apparently correct) results is compatible with a range of different rules. In other words, the results I reach *underdetermine* the rule I’m following. Two people could arrive at the same results over a large range of examples, but this offers no guarantee that they will not subsequently diverge at some unforeseen point. This consideration, as Wittgenstein perceived, rules out alternative (a), and Kripke agrees.

What then about my inner experiences in the past when I have performed the “add 2” calculation? If there is a continuity of inner experience, then this may constitute my grounds for thinking I am applying the rule in the same way. Kripke makes two connected points about this alternative. First, any given instance of meaning something by “add 2” may be accompanied by an inner experience, but then again it may not. This is a point Wittgenstein also makes. For example I may be waiting for something or someone while absorbed in some activity. My waiting or expecting is not an internal mental occurrence. Similarly we may perform calculations without any distinctive internal occurrence. The second point is this; even if there *were* an internal experience



which I had had on *previous* occasions of following the rule, what guarantee could I have that I have correctly re-identified it? Wittgenstein himself insists that there could be no such guarantee. And, as we noted above, if the internal experience is the experience of an “interpretation” of the rule, that interpretation is itself like another sign, itself requiring interpretation. These points mean that the second alternative is also inadequate. What about the third?

According to this alternative my grasp of the rule is to be explained in terms of my *dispositions* to perform calculations. The first point Kripke makes against this is that a rule like “add 2” has an infinite number of applications, but however I am disposed to calculate, I can only perform a finite number of calculations, and will therefore always fall short of the kind of (infinite) grasp understanding seems to require. And in any case, my actual future calculations fail to determine the rule I’m following, as we saw above in connection with alternative (a). Kripke’s second point is that if we do explain my grasp of the rule in terms of how I am disposed to use it in the future, what if I don’t go on to apply my grasp of the rule correctly? After all, it’s possible that through lack of attention, error or tiredness I may *misapply* the rule I have grasped. But according to (c) as it stands, we would have no way of excluding these faulty applications. But this amounts to the admission that we cannot meet the standard of normativity which language requires, and so the third alternative must also be rejected. This concludes Kripke’s main argument. As noted above, at this point he concludes that rule-following cannot be what we take it to be and urges us to modify our conception, replacing truth conditions by assertability conditions.

The sceptical implications of Kripke’s account are of course troubling. In addition, the implications of Kripke’s argument against dispositions (alternative (c)) are independently serious. When we describe someone’s character, for example, we may attribute dispositions to him or her. But if Kripke is correct, the same problem occurs with these attributions too. Colin McGinn<sup>39</sup> writes,

“It is not only meaning and concepts that resist the kind of reductionism Kripke is tacitly presupposing; there are other psychological concepts which seem not to be capturable by any fact on Kripke’s list of candidate constitutive facts. And this being so we have independent confirmation that (psychological) factuality does not require the

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<sup>39</sup> McGinn, (Op. Cit).

sorts of grounding Kripke considers; that is we need to adopt an irreducibility thesis with respect to these other concepts too....Is it to be supposed that such traits [character traits] can be explained in terms of facts from Kripke's three categories? Well, that does appear rather unlikely; certainly actual behaviour will underdetermine the ascription of character traits, as can be seen by contriving rival sceptical hypotheses...the point here is that character traits, like meaning, have consequences that go beyond their actual manifestations, so that we cannot hope to *define* them by reference to their actual manifestations." (McGinn.p.155)

And McGinn points out that similar sceptical problems arise about our *concepts*. As his remarks quoted above suggest, he favours openly rejecting the assumption of reductionism about these notions. There *is* no reduction available into other terms;

"..What makes true an ascription to someone of the thought that that 5 added to 7 equals 12 is precisely the thought that 5 added to 7 equals 12. These truistic replies give expression to the conviction that there is no reduction to be had of the concept of concept or that of a thought having a content; hence the factuality of concept ascription must rest upon nothing other than the existence of irreducibly conceptual facts- facts specified using frankly intentional notions. Why after all should we expect that the notion of a propositional attitude with a specific conceptual content should be explicable in terms of such notions as actual application, state of consciousness or disposition?"<sup>40</sup>

So, even if Kripke's arguments demolish the alternatives, why should we suppose that this casts doubt on the phenomena under scrutiny? McGinn is surely right in thinking that it is a plausible alternative- at least in advance of some explanation why not- that these intentional notions are not susceptible to reduction. Crispin Wright <sup>41</sup> also raises another objection to Kripke; he points out that the alternatives Kripke offers tacitly assume that my knowledge of how I understand a concept or rule must be a matter of *inference from* some other facts. That is; the problem, as Kripke sees it, is how I am justified in thinking that I understand the same thing by a term or concept as I did in the past. His sceptical arguments then show that none of the kinds of facts considered could provide justification for thinking this.

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<sup>40</sup> McGinn, (Op.Cit)



However, the assumption that such knowledge must *be* an inference is dubious. After all, we do not worry about the fact that in acting I do not infer my *intentions* from some other kind of fact. This is a particular instance of the point made several times in chapter one. I do not know my intentions by inference. So perhaps the same is true for my knowledge of what I mean or understand. It is clear also that Wittgenstein himself did not draw the same sceptical lesson as Kripke. He says,

“What this[ the arguments against interpretations etc.] shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule”..”

(P.I. 201)

So he sees himself as removing misconceptions about the nature of rule-following rather than arguing against its existence. He seems content that we *do* grasp rules, but offers no more detailed characterisation of it than to say it doesn't involve interpretation. If Wittgenstein's arguments about rule-following do not entail Kripke's sceptical conclusion, what conclusion can we derive from them?

We can, it seems, draw a couple of conclusions unifying seeing-as and rule-following. The understanding in both of these is best thought of as an *ability* (“Now I know how to go on”, “Now I can see it”)- which of course, need not imply behaviourism. Further, in both cases the understanding involved is *not* the product of inference. Where there are inferences there are *hypotheses*, and we saw earlier that this cannot be a characterisation of seeing-as. We have also seen that following rules, or applying concepts cannot be a process of inferring from criteria or “interpretations” of rules. As Wittgenstein says, in following a rule we act without reason, there are no “grounds” as such for our judgement. It is natural to talk about “perspective” in both cases, and to use the metaphors of perception (“You're just not seeing it...”). In these respects, both phenomena constitute a unified objection to a “common-sense” picture of what understanding is. As a way of summing up the points I have been making, we can set against the Davidsonian/Platonic conception of understanding underwritten by general propositions and rules, the quotation from Goethe cited by Wittgenstein;

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<sup>41</sup> Wright (Op. Cit).

“Don’t look for anything behind the phenomena; they themselves are the theory”<sup>42</sup>

We can also see what this account implies about the concept of *rationality*. To be correctly following a rule, to be seeing something correctly or *appropriately* ultimately involve being able to adopt a certain *perspective*. The idea that here rationality is something that can be inferred by deductive means, is a mistake<sup>43</sup>. This allows, as I have claimed, that emotions can be rational and irrational. But unlike Davidson, I do not think this is because they can be shown to be consistent or inconsistent with a range of *beliefs* that the agent has<sup>44</sup>. If what is required, then, in certain areas is correct *seeing*, and not correct believing, then it follows that various styles of “argument” may be relevant to this end which are not driven by logical deduction. Wittgenstein gives an indication of what might be involved;

“Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through “*experience*”.- Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*.- This is what “learning” and teaching are like here.- What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating rules.”<sup>45</sup>

Giving the right *tip* involves a style of teaching very different from argument, it is more the sort of thing people do when they try to get people to share their perception - of a work of art, say- but it will be more widespread if the account of understanding given above is correct. This central insight, which echoes Aristotle’s theory of correct

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<sup>42</sup> *R.P.P. vol.1 889*. There is also an explicit discussion of generality in the *Blue and Brown Books*; “Instead of “craving for generality” I could have said “the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case”. He goes on to argue that it is the image of science and scientific understanding which drives the philosopher to seek generality, and is “the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness”. *The Blue Book* (p.18).

<sup>43</sup> Which is not to say that the idea of deduction, contradiction etc. are a mistake. Nor does it mean that there are arguments which will convince by deductive means. It simply means that, as Wittgenstein famously put it, “arguments come to an end somewhere”, and in these cases, their terminus is in a kind of *seeing*.

<sup>44</sup> The role of the concept of belief in a Davidsonian account of rationality is explored in the final chapter.

<sup>45</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* pt.2, 227e.



perception, implies first of all that the Platonic lauding of *techne* involves a fundamental mistake, and similarly that the Platonic disparagement of rhetoric and the arts as falling short of such *techne*, as not embodying or fostering knowledge and understanding, is also a mistake. In the final chapter I will return to this issue and try to show how rhetoric and the arts can promote understanding. For the moment, however, it has been a necessary preparatory step to lay bare the assumptions underlying the contrary view and see why they are mistaken. I turn now turn, briefly, to the third facet of Wittgenstein's treatment of misunderstanding- secondary sense.

## Secondary Sense.

We have seen that in the context of applying concepts and following rules- say, ethical concepts and mathematical or moral rules- it is tempting to suppose that there are rules or criteria which provide a *procedure* of adjudication in any given instance. And we have seen that this picture is false. In addition to these points about the procedure-less nature of understanding, Wittgenstein argues that there is a kind of *analogical* understanding which involves important discontinuities in the use of terms. For example, when we listen to a theme in a passage of music, he says,

“ [it] makes an impression on me which is connected with things in its surroundings- eg. With our language and its intonations; and hence with the whole field of our language games.

If I say for example: Here it's as if a conclusion were being drawn, here as if something were being confirmed, *this* is like an answer to what was said before,- then my understanding presupposes a familiarity with inferences, with confirmation, with answers.” (Zettel 175)

In this kind of case we describe what we grasp by describing the music in other terms, “here a conclusion is drawn, here an answer restated”. Of course a conclusion is not *really* drawn, and an answer isn't really restated. Equally, when we describe music as “sad” or “brooding”, it is hard to see any real similarity between the music and the range of things that we normally call sad- personal loss, suffering, poverty, and so on. These latter uses - the “primary” sense of the word form more of a family. Describing music as sad, however seems to involve a use of the term which is different from, yet somehow connected to, the primary sense.

These are examples of what Wittgenstein describes as secondary sense<sup>46</sup>. We do not find it ridiculous, he says, to describe days of the week as being “fat” or “thin”, or to ascribe colours to different vowels. It might seem that these descriptions are merely metaphors. However there is a difference; although both metaphors and examples of secondary sense are literally false, in the case of a metaphor there is some *paraphrase*

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<sup>46</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* p. 216.



available which can sum up the meaning of the metaphor. This is not the case with secondary sense. Whatever is meant by saying that the music is sad or that Tuesday is fat, there is no paraphrase available.<sup>47</sup>

How should we explain what is understood by those who agree in the use of a term in its secondary sense? As already established, they cannot be using some procedure for the term's application and merely extending it to a new range of cases. One possibility is that what we have in the case of the primary use of a term what we might call a "feeling" for it. Here "feeling" refers to the intimacy we have with words; that their sense forces itself upon us immediately. That feeling is connected with the word. When we use the word in a secondary sense we have the same kind of "feeling". Wittgenstein gives the example of the feeling that one's surroundings are unreal:

"The feeling of the unreality of one's surroundings. This feeling I have had once, and many have it before the onset of mental illness. Everything seems somehow not *real*; but not as if one saw things unclear or blurred; everything looks quite as usual. And how do I know that another has felt what I have? Because he uses the same words as I find appropriate. But why do I choose the word "unreality" to express it?...I choose it because of its meaning. But I surely did not learn to use the word to mean; a *feeling*. No; but I learned to use it with a particular meaning and now I use it spontaneously like *this*. One might say- though it may mislead- When I have learnt the word in its ordinary meaning, then I choose that meaning as a simile for my feeling."

(R.P.P.1. 125)

The case of secondary sense offers an even clearer example, then, of the way in which understanding involves imagination and perception. In these cases, the secondary sense is seen as an *appropriate extension* of the primary sense, but it is impossible to *explain* the sense in which it is appropriate. Those who feel that "unreal" is the correct description of their experience, for example, appear to *understand* something, but our attempts to say *what* they understand, or *how* they understand it, are quickly frustrated. However we should not allow the apparent mystery of secondary sense to cast doubt on its existence. If we find it vague in comparison with *primary* sense, this is almost

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<sup>47</sup> On Secondary Sense, see Cora Diamond, "Secondary Sense", in *The Realistic Spirit*. Also Scruton, *Art and Imagination*.

certainly because we have mistaken conceptions about that too. The considerations presented earlier in this chapter hopefully reveal primary sense to be in large part mysterious itself. At the very least, it is clearly not a question of grasping definitions or applying procedures. This concludes my discussion of Wittgenstein's picture of understanding. It will hopefully now be clear how such a picture supports the account of emotion in chapter one, and also criticisms made there of some rival pictures, such as Davidson's. In the next section I turn to the account of ethical understanding offered by John McDowell, which builds on the insight of uncodifiability of understanding which we have been looking at. This account will also generate an argument in favour of *cognitivism*. This, at least, is McDowell's aim.

### Uncodifiability.

I noted in the previous chapter that there is an argument in favour of cognitivism in the writings of John McDowell<sup>48</sup>. We are now in a better position to consider that argument now, as it is based on the uncodifiability of ethical understanding and explicitly draws on Wittgensteinian arguments like those we have been looking at.

The Humean picture which we considered in the previous chapter may seem seductive, indeed unavoidable, especially if, as noted, we take a certain view of "the facts". If the facts are simply the everyday "empirical" facts available to everyone, then what else *could* explain the difference between those motivated to act and those not so motivated, but the presence or absence of a *desire*? However, if the facts are not restricted to this sort but are instead the sort of facts which we have to learn to perceive, we have at least the beginnings of an alternative picture. On this alternative picture, there is room for the difference to be explained by a *cognitive* factor.

In several papers John McDowell has proposed this kind of alternative. In essence it exploits the insights of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following which we considered above. McDowell attacks both the claim that the cognitive element of moral understanding involves the grasp of rules, as we ordinarily think of them, and the non-cognitivism of Hume. For McDowell the objection to both these is the same. On the

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<sup>48</sup> Especially, "Virtue and Reason" reproduced in Crisp, (ed), *Virtue Ethics*.



rule based, non-cognitive view, the picture of moral deliberation is roughly this; my deliberation takes the form of a syllogism with the major premise being a desire to do or avoid actions of a given type, and the minor premise the perception that this is an action of that sort. So in a case where I help a friend who is in need the syllogism might be something like this;

A) I desire to help my friends. (General, major premise with non-cognitive element.)

B) My friend is in need. (Particular, minor premise, with cognitive content.)

The upshot of this syllogism- barring weakness of the will, and assuming there are no competing factors of comparable significance, and so on - will be that I help my friend. On this picture, the particular perception *motivates* because it connects with the content of the major premise. But according to McDowell, in order for this schema to be explanatory we need to be able to specify the content of the major premise, and this is what he claims cannot be done. Citing Wittgenstein's arguments concerning rule-following, he argues that moral understanding should be thought of as uncodifiable<sup>49</sup>. Consequently, the action cannot be rendered intelligible, or analysed, he says, into a perception and a major premise of the required sort. The reason for this is that the perception involved will have to be something *neutral*, in order to satisfy the non-cognitivist, as in premise (B) above. But if the major premise cannot be spelled out, this creates a difficulty. As stated above, premise (A) is too restricted to figure as the relevant cognitive background. It involves merely a "desire to help friends". But clearly there might be many cases in which other considerations take priority, or whether other

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<sup>49</sup> He also suggests, following Iris Murdoch, that the Platonic theory of the Forms is itself a response to the uncodifiability of understanding. Faced with a moral reality which cannot be captured in rules and generalisations, it is natural to talk, as Plato does, of the Form of the Good, in terms of something *seen*. Plato's metaphor, he argues, also captures the *difficulty* involved in correct perception. Plato's choice of the perceptual metaphor of perception of the Sun - as both McDowell and Murdoch argue - indicates that Plato accepts that the process of philosophical understanding cannot wholly be characterised by the operation of the dialectical process. In particular, it suggests a limit to which knowledge is simply a matter of the apprehension of true propositions. This is an important qualification on Plato's insistence elsewhere that *episteme* can be arrived at only through philosophical method, and that therefore practices such as rhetoric and art cannot deliver true understanding precisely *because* they do not proceed by dialectical method. This issue will be taken up again in chapter eight, where I will consider in more detail Plato's insistence that dialectic is the only route to understanding.

considerations make helping a bad idea. But exactly what this network of features might be and how they would be related or ranked is not stateable. But without it, the idea of the syllogism is not explanatory.

Part of the reason for this is that the syllogism is the rational paradigm, a point which we have already discussed above. We are inclined to think, says McDowell,

“...that there ought to be a neutral external standpoint from which the rationality of any genuine exercise of reason could be demonstrated”.<sup>50</sup>

Now certainly McDowell is right that if understanding is uncodifiable, the syllogism cannot serve this function. It cannot show the rational person's action to be rational to someone who does not share the perspective required to provide the uncodifiable major premise. But that does not show that non-cognitivism is false. The non-cognitivist claims that even the actions of the virtuous man himself can be analysed into the schema of major and minor premise as above. McDowell doesn't seem to have shown that this cannot be done. Roger Crisp suggests that the non-cognitivist can simply admit that the full content of the desire in the major premise cannot be spelled out, but it is still a *desire*;

“It is not clear however, why the non-cognitivist could not accept uncodifiability and yet claim that the major premise is a mere desire. The “seeing” required will be that of understanding the content of the desire itself. The virtuous person just desires to live like this, while the vicious person just desires to live like that.”(Crisp p.15)

This does seem a possible reply. But it may raise another worry, but not one McDowell himself raises; does it allow enough room for learning and discovery? After all, there are cases in which the perception that something is selfish or that the music is beautiful is a genuine *discovery*. However, on the present non-cognitivist picture, nothing motivates me which is not *already* captured in the intentional component of my desire. So how *could* the perception be a novelty?

If, for example, after some effort, I manage to enjoy some Wagner, or finally see why my action was thoughtless, the normal explanation we would give is that my newly

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<sup>50</sup> McDowell,(p. 159).



achieved understanding has affected me; for example, it is what I *grasp* in listening that makes me enjoy it. But the non-cognitivist must deny that cognitions - new or old - can give rise to motivations. He must claim that to enjoy the music or be motivated by the action, there must *already* be some desire with which it connects. But then novel perceptions *never* motivate by creating new desires; they can only do so when they instantiate desires that already exist. But it seems plausible to claim that these “discovery” experiences *do add* something to my overall understanding- to the full, but uncodifiable view implicit in the major premise of the syllogism. But new cognitions could only motivate by being brought under existing motivations. The non-cognitivist is then forced to find some description of the major premise that covers the new insights. So for example, the major premise might be a desire to live “The Good Life”. The perception in the minor premise would then have to be that *this* kind of thing (listening to Wagner, not being thoughtless) is part of the good life<sup>51</sup>.

Against this non-cognitivist account, we might feel that the following picture was truer to experience; that as we develop, *new* kinds of experiences provide us with *new* kinds of motivations; discovering music of a certain sort, we might feel, provides us with new motivations, not by revealing itself as an instance of an *existing* desire, but by its own nature. If this is a plausible picture, it offers some support for strong cognitivism.

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<sup>51</sup> Since the cognition in the minor premise must be *neutral* on this picture, it is hard to see how it *could* be the experience of discovering that Wagner is beautiful, or part of the good life, since the experience of beauty is not neutral. The appeal of cognitivism in this respect is that it allows that the perception of the qualities of a particular object *can* affect us, without *first* having their credentials validated via the major premise.

## Responsibility.

Up to this point I have been arguing that the importance of emotions lies in the contribution they make to our understanding. In the next chapter I will consider in more detail what this contribution is and how it embodies concerns that can be called ethical. “Strong” cognitivism, I have maintained, makes legitimate our critical stance towards those who lack appropriate emotions. Even if not all our emotions fall within the sphere of the ethical, many of them do, and it would seem to be a pre-requisite of a any criticism of such emotions that we are in a position to change our emotional dispositions. In other words, we must be responsible for our emotions. So the question arises whether this is a legitimate assumption. At least one well known philosophical view- Kant’s - has it that we are *not* responsible for our emotions, and that this is the primary reason why emotions are not relevant to ethics. On another view - Sartre’s- we are *entirely* responsible for our emotions, since they are held to be a kind of *action*. Sartre’s view will be discussd in the next and final chapters. For the moment, I will consider whether we should accept the Kantian view.

The objection Kant had to the importance of the emotions is not unlike Plato’s; both see the human subject as *divided* between his rational nature and his nature as a physical object in the world of nature, driven by natural forces and subject to the laws of cause and effect. In order to explain free will Kant finds it necessary to isolate a “space” free from causal determination. But this in turn involves separating our “empirical” self from our “rational” self, and since our emotional life falls on the “empirical” side it is part of the world of cause and effect, and so cannot, for Kant, be a source of moral value. Nor can emotions be things for which we are responsible.

However the question of the freedom of the will is to be solved, it may seem true that there are very few- if any- instances where my emotional reaction can be held in check by the will. If we hold people responsible for their emotions, then must they not have control over them, as they seem to do over their actions? However, emotional responses are immediate, and more importantly, *passive*. Unlike actions, they are not things we *do*,



but things that happen *to us*<sup>52</sup>. The point is not that all emotional reactions are extreme like rage, say, during which the subject may be “out of control”. Even moderate emotional reactions are, in the relevant sense, not our responsibility.

On reflection, however, we may wonder whether our emotions really are beyond our control in this way. We might legitimately question, for instance, the claim that we have no active role in the formation of our emotional dispositions. However that may be, we have seen that there is also a second consideration which is held to show that we are not *responsible* for our emotions. This is the considerations that we are frequently powerless to control our emotional responses. How then can we be held responsible for what we cannot control? However persuasive this argument appears, it rests on a dubious assumption- the assumption is that if something that happens *now* is not subject to my will *now*, then I cannot be held responsible for it. That is; the objection says, in effect; my emotional response is something that I cannot *now* control and so I cannot be held responsible for it. But is this correct? If we move beyond the sphere of the emotions for a moment, we have no difficulty in finding examples which falsify this assumption. If I poisoned your food this morning, it may *now* be out of my control to alter the outcome; even if I *wanted* to stop you eating the food perhaps I would now be unable to. Yet surely I am responsible for your death. What *explains* my responsibility is not my ability to control (now) what happens now, but the decisions I made *earlier*, and whether I am responsible for *those*.

The situation in the case of emotions, then, may be parallel. Even if I can't help my response when it comes, it doesn't follow that I could not have acted at some time *in the past* to effect a different response *now*; by for example trying to alter my emotional dispositions. And this is surely what we think we *do* do. Many- perhaps most- of us hope that our character is something we have a hand in forming. Exactly what goes on when we succeed in exerting this kind of control is difficult to say, as it is difficult to say what learning generally involves. The question of character is one that I will deal with in the next chapter. This brief discussion should hopefully serve to dispense with *one* frequently employed objection to the ethical significance of emotion. In the following chapter I turn to a variety of other such objections and argue that they are all similarly mistaken.

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<sup>52</sup> Even so, beliefs also share this kind of passivity, but it is not implausible that we are *responsible* for our beliefs.

## Chapter Four; Emotion and Value.

In chapter two I considered why we might think emotions are valuable. The answer offered there was that they afford us a distinct kind of understanding. That answer can now serve as a basis in approaching further questions about the value of emotions. For instance, what are the connections between emotional responses and ethical understanding? On one view, to be discussed shortly, correct evaluative understanding requires emotion- although it remains a further question whether such ethical connections *exhaust* the value of emotions. Or, on the other hand, should we think of emotions as forces antagonistic in some way to the proper requirements of ethical thought- perhaps as conflicting with the demands of impartiality or objectivity. These are the questions I shall be considering in this chapter.

The theory which offers the most developed picture of the way in which emotions are involved in ethics is Aristotle's, for whom the good life involves "activity in accordance with virtue". Both of these components are necessary since virtue which issues in neither action nor response is unrealised and incomplete. Furthermore, virtue involves not merely right *action* but action done from the right *motive and with the right emotion*<sup>1</sup>; that springs from the correct sort of *character*. I noted in the previous chapter that some philosophers have objected that emotional responses, unlike actions, are not subject to the will, and therefore we can attach no moral significance to them. And I offered reasons for thinking that that objection is not a good one. Aristotle, while recognising that emotions are not subject to the immediate will, believes however that the development of character *is*. Since character dispositions can be educated and developed, our resulting emotional responses do reveal how virtuous we are.

One advantage of Aristotle's view of the significance of emotions, and of his ethical theory generally, is that his conception of what is valuable is considerably wider than the narrower focus on the category of the "moral". The category of the "ethical" which he focuses on includes all the virtues and goods required for the Good life. This encompasses a much larger terrain than the narrowly moral, and enables us to see why a much bigger

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<sup>1</sup> See L. A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected", in Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle*.



part of our emotional lives might be valuable. Emotions like generosity and some cases of guilt, say, might be relevant to a narrowly “moral” focus on the value of emotions, but Aristotle’s account takes in shame, pride, anger, grief and others, and sees an importance in them even in contexts which are not recognisably “moral”. The parent who plays with their children out of joy is quite different from the parent who does so out of a sense of duty, and Aristotle offers an explanation of the importance we ascribe to differences of this sort.

This view, or something very like it, might seem intuitively appealing, perhaps even uncontroversial. However, before going any further into the details of Aristotle’s theory, there are three objections to it which need to be considered. The first objection comes from certain “impartialist” moral theories which regard the involvement of emotions in moral judgement as pernicious for the simple reason that moral thinking imposes a strict requirement of equality or impartiality, and acting out of our emotional commitments interferes with this requirement.

Second, there is an objection to the whole conception of character as what Aristotle refers to as “second nature”. In the brief sketch above I referred to Aristotle’s claim that character is essential to virtue. He also claimed, as we shall see later, that the fundamentals of the cultivation of character must take place early in life and that if someone has the wrong kind of upbringing he will be incapable of virtue or of learning anything from lectures like Aristotle’s. Against this picture, there is what we might refer to as the “Existentialist” objection. Sartre, for instance, often seems to be claiming a certain sort of “radical” freedom for human choice and agency which would be quite incompatible with the Aristotelian conception of character. When Aristotle talks of someone acting from character, we can think of this as him acting out of a settled way of seeing the world. Such settled perceptions, if they are to constitute character *at all* must seriously circumscribe the possibilities of choice. And on this account, where choice is appropriate, it is certainly not “radical” in the way Sartre seems to suggest.

A third kind of objection comes from the writings of the Stoic philosophers, both Greek and later Roman. They argue against Aristotle firstly; that emotional attachments are a source of misery and distress, and therefore, far from being a necessary constituent of human flourishing, they make human contentment impossible. Secondly, they claim that virtue alone is *sufficient* for happiness or *eudaimonia*. Valuing “external” goods (which is what our emotions involve) is consequently a mistake. Third, they claim that the practice of valuing external goods is socially inculcated. The harmful effects of society’s teachings

can only be reversed by withdrawal from society and the undertaking of a course of Stoic therapy.

We must, then, answer these objections if the Aristotelian account of the value of emotion is to be upheld. In addition to these objections, however, there has also been a general presumption against emotion in ethical matters, a presumption which flows from the thought that ethical questions must be decided by *reason*. In the next section I will consider the first two of the objections listed above, and the Stoic objections later in the chapter.

## Emotions and Impartiality.

We can start by describing a possible view about ethics which I will call, following John Cottingham<sup>2</sup> the Impartiality Thesis. The Impartiality Thesis says that when deliberating and making moral decisions we ought not to give any special moral weight to our own interests, concerns, desires etc. Rather than giving special weight to our own interests, or preference to those of our own social group or species, we should adopt an impartial standpoint.

Since we assume that moral thought and action is opposed to what is selfish, this thesis might seem acceptable, indeed undeniable. However, on reflection, if it implies not only that all *selfish* action is opposed to morality, but that all *self-interested* action is morally wrong too, then this is not so clear. Many actions I perform are certainly self-interested; I go for a swim in the interests of my health, I eat a piece of chocolate for the pleasure it gives me, and so on. But as long as this does not adversely affect the interests of others it will be allowable. And in these cases the fact that the chocolate will give *me* pleasure is a legitimate basis for action. And most of us do in any case take account of the interests of others. But, as Cottingham notes, to say that moral thought must do this falls short of the Impartiality thesis; for *it* claims, not merely that I must take *into account* the interests of others, but that I must give them the *same weight* as I do my own interests. As Peter

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<sup>2</sup> John Cottingham, "Ethics and Impartiality", *Philosophical Studies*, 1983.



Singer puts it, “..my own interests cannot, simply because they are *my* interests, count more than the interests of anyone else.”<sup>3</sup>

But in contrast to the weaker claim about considering the interests of others, this is certainly *not* obviously true. Two reasons we might offer against it are these; first, it would seem to prohibit me, in any of my deliberations, from taking seriously the fact that a given course of action (say, the one that would produce the best overall outcome) goes against my most deeply held attitudes - those with which I most closely identify myself<sup>4</sup>. To make this fact the basis of my deliberation and allow it to override the possible beneficial consequences to others would seem to involve favouring my own interests over -say- the suffering of others. Secondly, and more generally, according to the Impartiality Thesis, the fact that someone is my wife, son, lover and so on, does not give me -morally speaking- any reason for saving *them* rather than anyone else. Here, then, apparently, is one area where emotional commitments *would* conflict with morality rather than form a part of it.

Before considering this argument, we should note that it is no reply to the objection just made, to claim that the Impartiality Thesis can legitimate the choice to save one's loved ones since such a choice could be regarded as an instance of the application of some general rule such as the rule that “everyone may save their wife, son, lover etc.” In this way the defender of the Thesis might attempt to avert the counter-intuitive implications it threatens by claiming that what at first blush seem examples of favouritism can in fact be derived from universal principles. However, this would allow something that the Thesis rules out. Namely, it would allow that I have a reason to save *my* son, but not *yours*. Furthermore, there are real doubts -which we shall consider in a later section- whether someone deliberating in this way *is* deliberating in a way we think virtuous<sup>5</sup>. But some of our emotional commitments to those close to us *do* seem to provide us with moral reasons for action that go against the Impartiality Thesis. In these cases we do not think that favouring those close to us is a form of egoism. On the contrary, we would regard

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (p. 12).

<sup>4</sup> Examples of this sort are familiar from discussions of utilitarianism. See for instance, Bernard Williams, “Utilitarianism and Self-Indulgence” in *Moral Luck*.

<sup>5</sup> An argument of this sort is offered by Bernard Williams in his “Persons, Character and Morality”, where he argues that in cases where emotional ties are involved, such as the case of a man saving his wife, moral theory typically gives the man “one thought too many”. Thoughts of conforming to rules and duties, Williams argues, should not feature in the man's deliberation. The thought he should have, ideally, is simply “this is my wife”.



someone who *failed* to have or act on such motives morally deficient. To this extent it seems that some emotional commitments do legitimately militate against strict impartiality in ethics. But the conclusion we should reach then is, perhaps, that it was a mistake to identify ethics with impartiality in the first place. Saying this though is not yet to fully explain how such emotional commitments do fit in to a general picture of ethics. Providing such an account will be one of the eventual aims of the rest of the chapter.

A more general point associated with the kind of argument I quoted Peter Singer as giving is also worth mentioning. Singer's impartiality is linked to his utilitarianism. In various places for example, he has put forward the case for vegetarianism. He argues that animals feel pain, and that, morally speaking, their pain is no less important than ours. The details of this particular argument do not concern us here, but there is a picture of the role emotions play, which is associated with it, which does concern us. The reason we fail to be concerned by the suffering of others, Singer says, is that we are afflicted by "speciesism", a partiality in favour of what we see as "our own". The abolition of slavery, for example, universal suffrage and the growth in sexual equality, have been achieved by fighting against deeply held prejudices, and these prejudices have been largely emotional in nature. The same, says Singer, is now true of our attitude to animals<sup>6</sup>. In general, we might imagine Singer's point to be that emotions are nothing more than indicators of the current state of cultural prejudice. At best they can be overcome, at worst they actively mislead us. But they are certainly no basis for morality or ethics.

The most important point to emphasise in responding to this argument is that even if *some* emotions are mistaken or inappropriate, that does not show that they all are. And if the argument were intended to show *that* conclusion, there are at least as many examples of emotional involvement in judgement which tell against it. Often, as we have already seen, an absence of emotion is legitimately regarded as a failure. Secondly, suppose Singer convinced us, by highlighting the parallels between humans and animals, that we were wrong to ignore animal suffering. The argument could only succeed if we *cared* about suffering- at least in *some* cases- in the first place. And that does seem to be based on the fact that suffering affects us. Thirdly, if our emotional reactions did not embody appropriate evaluative judgements, that would only be a lamentable consequence if we

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<sup>6</sup> I do not know that Singer does in fact hold this general view of our emotions, and certainly there is nothing in his writings that commits him to it. I claim merely that it is a view which is consistent with some of what he says. It is, in any case, a view fairly frequently heard, which makes it worth considering.



thought it was *good* that our emotional reactions do reflect or embody an awareness of what is really valuable. We can conclude then that the general argument about emotions that I have imputed to Singer above is unsuccessful and therefore no threat to the kind of general picture of the significance of emotions with which I began.

Before moving on, there is another familiar objection to the ethical significance of emotions, which can be found both in authors such as Kant and in modern writers on ethics<sup>7</sup>. The argument is that as a basis for ethical motivation the emotions are simply too *unreliable*. At best, emotion can be educated not to *conflict* with reason, but it can never be the basis of ethical understanding itself; emotions are simply too susceptible to whim. In replying to this we can begin by noting that since emotion can be educated, as the objection itself concedes, there is reason to suppose that our emotional reactions may in fact achieve a high level of consistency. And indeed why *should* my emotional reaction to suffering, say, be any less consistent than my “rational” perception of duty? Even if we concede that our emotional capacities are not infallible, which is clearly true, what argument shows that “reason” itself fares any better? In any case, I have already argued against the mythical divorce between reason and emotion, and we can supplement this defence by insisting that often an *un*-emotional reaction would be *deficient*, even unreasonable. I conclude then that this objection is empty. However, it is worth giving a little more attention to the objection that ethical questions must be decided by reason alone, and it is to this claim that I now turn.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kant, *Groundwork*, 425

## Emotions in Ethics.

The role of imagination in our ethical thought is often obscured in discussions of morality. One reason for this is the preoccupation with principle and rules, which we have already looked at (in chapter three). The same tradition which emphasises reason and principles of duty also emphasises particular features of our psychology at the expense of others. As Iris Murdoch, for example, has argued, on such a view the only important psychological feature is taken to be the will and its products- decisions and choices<sup>8</sup>. As a result, emotion is taken to be irrelevant, as is the rest of the “inner life”. The inadequacies of this picture come out in a number of ways. One way to approach them is through the subject of moral dilemmas.

Two moral dilemmas drawn from fiction which have attracted the attention of philosophers are the cases of Twain’s Huckleberry Finn<sup>9</sup> and Melville’s Billy Budd.<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Bennett has discussed the case of Huckleberry Finn; Huck’s dilemma is that he is torn between his conscience which tells him to turn in the runaway slave Jim, and his emotions which urge him not to. For Bennett, what Huck’s dilemma shows is the distinction between emotional “pulls” and rational rules and principles. Bennett takes it that this shows that emotions are merely something which make him fail to do what he has decided (on the basis of his “principles”) to do. Emotions are, in short, merely the disruptive factors they are so often thought to be. In Huck’s case the result of their influence, according to Bennett, is incontinence;

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<sup>8</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*. Murdoch is thinking principally about the existentialists, but the emphasis on will and choice, she notes, is already present in Kant.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn.”, *Philosophy*, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Winch, “The Universalisability of Moral Judgement” in *Ethics and Action*.



“The crucial point concerns reasons, which all occur on one side of the conflict. On the side of conscience we have principles, arguments, considerations, ways of looking at things....On the other side, the side of feeling, we get nothing like that...he simply fails to do what he believes to be right, he isn't strong enough.”

In short, the example reveals, “the difference between general moral principles and particular unreasoned emotional pulls”. This view of the case has not been universally accepted. In her response to Bennett's analysis Jenny Teichman pointed out that from the fact that an emotion is not the same thing as a moral judgement it does not follow that feelings may not *involve* judgements. And indeed this is precisely what was argued about the nature of emotion in chapter one. Additionally, Phillip Montague has argued that Bennett's view of the case assumes that conscientious principle is always better than unprincipled emotional response. But is it? We can find grounds for thinking it is not in another of Bennett's examples; that of Himmler.

Himmler appears to have been convinced that what he and those like him were doing was *right*; it was for him a matter of moral or conscientious principle. He experienced great difficulty however, in carrying out what he felt was his duty, and, according to Bennett, he anticipated the emotional difficulties he would have in carrying out his task, but was resolved to overcome them. He decided that his feelings of revulsion would have to be subordinated to the greater moral purpose in which he was engaged. So Himmler managed to act continently *and* on conscientious principle, precisely what Bennett commends. But *his* principle was a morally bad one. In his case the presence of emotional reactions such as sympathy was surely a *good* thing, an indicator of how he should have acted - his tragedy was that he managed to overcome them. This strongly suggests that Bennett is wrong in thinking that the “moral” considerations are all on the side of “reason”.

In any case Bennett's argument simply *assumes* that reason and emotion are distinct and separate. If the arguments presented in chapter one are correct, this assumption is also mistaken. A consequence of these views is that Bennett does not even consider it a possible option that Huck's sympathy could be an expression of his moral identity. But if we allow that emotions do embody cognitive elements, this becomes a possibility. Emotions are relevant in just this way to Peter Winch's discussion of Melville's Billy Budd. In Melville's story Captain Vere faces a dilemma; whether or not to have Budd shot as an example and thereby maintain discipline. Winch's main point is that in these



cases it is legitimate to allow that we will not all reach the same conclusion about what to do. But the conclusions we do reach reveal something about our identity. Moreover, the conclusion that a course of action is either not one we could adopt or the one we must follow, is not reached through deduction, but is rather an outcome which, perhaps with the help of imagination, we find forced upon us. But this kind of capacity or incapacity is *affective*; we only discover that we are incapable through our emotional reactions. This topic has been more recently discussed by Bernard Williams under the heading of "Practical Necessity"<sup>11</sup>, and I will return to it below. The conclusion we have reached so far however, is that there are no obvious arguments which succeed in showing emotions to be irrelevant to ethics, and a variety of cases which strongly suggest the reverse. I will end this section by considering one example of such an emotion- regret.

Regret has attracted the attention of several philosophers<sup>12</sup> interested in ethical theory. Bernard Williams considers the following kinds of case. It is a feature of non-utilitarian moral thought that even when we act rightly, there may be what Williams calls a "moral remainder". For example, in a situation where there are conflicting ethical considerations which cannot both be satisfied, one of these will have to be sacrificed. If I think it would be right to keep a promise, but also right to help someone in distress, it may be that I cannot do both. But although I can be satisfied that I have done the right thing, I may still feel regret. This is because the defeated consideration, is not simply *erased*, as it is (and must be) for the utilitarian; it remains, and continues to exert moral force. In some cases it may even give rise to a need for reparation. In such cases, the person who did not *feel* regret, ("agent-regret" as Williams calls it) is ethically deficient.

A second kind of case is illustrated by the fate of Oedipus who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. A non-fiction case which makes the same point is that of the driver who runs down and kills someone who steps in front of his car. Let us assume the driver has not been drinking, was not speeding or driving recklessly- was in fact blameless. As Williams remarks, bystanders will attempt to reassure the driver by telling him it was not his fault, that he is not responsible, that he should not blame himself. But the driver certainly will feel "agent-regret"; he will be racked by a sense of having "done" something terrible. Moreover the bystanders themselves, while trying to assuage such

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<sup>11</sup> See Bernard Williams, "Practical Necessity", in *Moral Luck*, and "Moral Incapacity" in *Making Sense of Humanity*.

<sup>12</sup> Principally, Williams, "Moral Luck", in *Moral Luck*; M. Baron, "Remorse and Agent Regret" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol.13; Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt*.



feelings, would be surprised and - more importantly - *suspicious* of a driver who did not have them. In both these kinds of case, there is no question of blame, yet regret is felt to be appropriate.

It is an interesting question what cognitive attitudes towards our own actions (including what we are merely *causally* responsible for) and towards others underpin the sense that regret is required. For my purposes it is sufficient to note that the regret in these cases is a product of character in some way, and we regard the presence or absence of such responses as revealing the agent's character. Moreover, looked at in one way - in terms of what it is *rational* (on one construal of "rational") to feel - there is no reason to feel regret in these cases. Why then do we take the absence of these emotions as a kind of moral failure? In chapter eight I offer a tentative answer to this question - that the appropriateness of emotional responses cannot be judged by the usual criteria by which we judge the rationality of other things such as beliefs, actions or desires. For the moment, however, the point of the preceding discussion of regret is to provide an illustration of the ways in which specifically emotional responses are regarded as indicators of virtue and character.

## Second Nature and Existentialism.

The second objection I raised at the start of the chapter was what I labelled the "existentialist" objection. This argument focuses on the nature of character, or rather it objects to a certain picture of character and deliberation. What it emphasises instead is the- unavoidable, in some sense- freedom of human choice. We are unconstrained, it is said, in our choices, and to think we are not is to refuse to confront the reality of our situation. An apparently clear example of this view of things is Sartre's famous description<sup>13</sup> of the young man who comes to him seeking advice about how he should resolve the dilemma between going off to fight for the Resistance movement and staying to look after his ailing mother. Sartre insists that the young man is free and so must therefore *choose*. On one view of what Sartre is claiming, choice is supposed to be "radical" in the sense that the young man is not constrained by reasons of one sort or another. He cannot hope to look to reasons or considerations of any sort to *settle* the

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<sup>13</sup> In *Existentialism and Humanism*.

matter and so avoid choice. Were he to claim that one consideration rather than another was decisive, he would be in bad faith, for the relevant considerations settle nothing- only choice can do that.

However this raises the question of whether we act for reasons at all. Sartre's insistence that choice is radical suggests that the agent must either *decide* to give one consideration unequal weight (rather than *discover* that it is weightier), or, after surveying the facts that count for him, he must simply choose (by tossing a coin, for example) in favour of one rather than the other. But, to return to Iris Murdoch's point, noted above, what both these scenarios have in common is that the dilemma is resolved finally, not by weighing up and scrutinising reasons, since *ex hypothesi* they are inconclusive, but by a brute act of will. *Radical* choice therefore threatens to be rather disappointing, even empty. If reasons do not influence choice *at all*, the choice is random. If, on the other hand it is conceded that they do influence choice, and the claim is merely that they do not *settle* matters, then Sartre's thesis is much less radical. If reasons *are* allowed to influence choice, it is surely an empirical question whether they can be conclusive. Sartre at any rate presents no general argument to the effect that they *cannot* be. In any case, the large claims Sartre makes about freedom do not seem compatible with the concession that choice *is* constrained by reasons. The more we reflect on the picture of ethical deliberation which Sartre's remarks suggest, the more puzzling it becomes. For one thing it becomes hard to see how there is any room in his account for the notion of character, since what that notion implies is precisely habits of thought and response which guide and give content to choice. The Radically Free agent seems also rather shallow. It is on precisely this point of course, that Sartre is in clearest opposition to Aristotle, who, as already remarked, insists on the importance of character and the role played by emotional response in constituting it. To see in detail why this is so, whether Sartre's view can be sustained and which view is more credible, we must begin by asking what character *is*.



## Character.

What is “character”? Is it the same as “personality”, or different? And, how is it related to other concepts like that of the “self”? One way to describe our use of the term “Personality” would be to say that it is concerned with *aesthetic* features, broadly construed, of the person; whether they are charming and witty or dour and introverted. But we distinguish this from character; our usage allows for someone with an unappealing personality to have a good character. Attila the Hun may, for all we know, have had a marvellous personality, but we feel sure from what we know that he did not have a good character.

Character, unlike personality, seems to refer to what a person values. To be someone of good character involves being someone who values the right things and whose actions bear out that fact. Having character in this sense is distinct from “being a character”. Having character is revealed by such things as not giving in to temptation, by adhering to what is held to be important in the face of other considerations. The novels of Jane Austen provide many illustrations of character in this sense. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, Elinor Dashwood is portrayed as someone of resolute character. Even when disappointed in love, she does not disclose confidences which might relieve her predicament or reproach the man who disappointed her. Instead, she resolves to keep her promises, and to respect Edward Ferrars, her lover, for doing so also, although it is his keeping the promise that results in her disappointment. Furthermore, she does not resent or seek revenge on her rival, Lucy, but instead endures her unchosen role as Lucy’s confidante. Finally, when Edward Ferrars is to be married to Lucy, she agrees, selflessly, to carry out a commission to offer him employment. Throughout, Elinor approaches everything with an irreproachable sense of what is fitting and appropriate and is never self-indulgent or mean. She can serve as an example of someone of character.

From what we have said so far it is clear that character is a matter of *integrity*, and we can see more clearly why this is so if we consider what is involved in acting upon our evaluations. If we deliberate about how to act, given various alternatives, and there is one alternative which is the one we value most, but there is also another which involves a

greater yield of pleasure, the person of character must be able to resist the temptation of the second option if he is to be able to act on his truly held evaluations.

A person who has evaluations but regularly fails to *act* on them because he cannot resist temptation is weak-willed. Temptation comes in different forms, of course; had Elinor Dashwood not been a person of integrity she might have given in to the temptation to hate her rival or to reveal her confidences.<sup>14</sup>

Character development involves at least two related processes; first, making deeper and firmer our sense of the value of things, and second, being able to resist the attraction of things that we do not value so much, but which are pleasant. These processes go hand in hand. To truly do the first of these *involves* doing the second<sup>15</sup>. The person who does the first but not the second has grasped what is valuable only in an attenuated sense. Not only has he failed to make his grasp of value a part of his dispositions, but he has only grasped it at all in a weaker sense.

In Aristotle's view character is in this sense on a continuum. At one end we have those who have no real values and are driven by whatever desires happen to seize them, and at the other the fully virtuous man. In between we have the weak-willed or incontinent man and the continent man. Integrity also involves something else, however. According to Aristotle, the judgements of the person of integrity flow from his practical understanding (*Phronesis*). This means that his sense of the *value* of one good in a specific context comes from a wider understanding which relates the values of different goods in different situations. The person of integrity therefore has a sense of the place and importance which different goods have in the good life<sup>16</sup>. We can now compare the idea of character which we have elaborated, with an account offered by Harry Frankfurt.

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<sup>14</sup> There is a relevant distinction to be made here between the person who is tempted in these ways but resists - the *continent* person - and the person who ceases to *feel* temptation. No doubt, however, these are points on a spectrum. Both of them, however, would count as examples of integrity.

<sup>15</sup> One of Martha Nussbaum's suggestions about incontinence is that the person who merely *believes* that something is valuable will be prone to temptation in a way that those who have a firmer grasp of its value will not. Having a "real" sense of the value of something involves not merely beliefs but a cognitive experience which is *itself* motivating; such a grasp *involves* not giving in to temptation. Of the akratic she writes; "She is however...not full confronting or acknowledging the situation to herself...so her intellectual grasp doesn't amount to perception, or to a real grasp...Even though she has the facts right, there is a perfectly good, though quite non-Socratic sense in which she doesn't know what she is doing". (*Love's Knowledge*, p. 80).

<sup>16</sup> One source of dispute at this point is whether this sense of the good life, and of the value of different goods needs to be *articulated*. Charles Talyor, in various writings (for example, "Self Interpreting Animals") argues that it does, while



## Frankfurt's "Wanton".

Character is formed through time. It is not something that children usually possess. To see in a little more detail what is involved in acquiring character, it will be useful to compare the person who possesses it with a fictional creation of Harry Frankfurt's,<sup>17</sup> the "wanton". The "wanton", as Frankfurt describes him, is someone who acts simply on the basis of his first-order desires. Whichever desire is stronger at any given time is the one that he will act upon. According to Frankfurt, what distinguishes the wanton from most of *us* is that we are not in the same way at the mercy of our first order desires. We are not simply blown about by whatever happens to be our strongest desire. We evaluate our first order desires; we have desires which we think important and those which we would prefer not to have or act upon. In this way, we have second order desires *about* first order desires. We want to have some desires and not others, in other words. What makes us agents with control over our lives, according to Frankfurt, is that we "identify" with our second order desires and make them our own. Frankfurt's intention in sketching the wanton is to isolate what it is that the wanton lacks. The rival picture which he builds up is that of a person with a developed character. So to be a person is, for Frankfurt, to exercise a kind of self-mastery; it is not merely to have desires but to *evaluate* those desires, and this involves us somehow "identifying" ourselves with some of them. So far, then, this account seems very similar to the one we have already sketched of the person of integrity.

So let us inquire, then first, if the positive picture that Frankfurt offers us is sufficient for the description of someone as having character - in particular, how should we understand the notion of "identification" as Frankfurt describes it? Second, if his account is not adequate but can be supplemented, to what extent does the resulting picture of character conflict with the Sartrean picture of choice that we considered, above? So, let us ask in what sense the person who possesses integrated character is "identified" with his values or projects. Frankfurt says simply,

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others have denied it. For discussion see Owen Flanagan, "Identity and Strong and Weak Evaluation", in Flanagan (ed) *Identity, Character and Morality*.

<sup>17</sup> Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person", in Watson ed. *Free Will*.

“Someone has a desire of the second order either when he wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will”. (p.86)

The identification that Frankfurt focuses on is the agent’s identification with his *will*. He or she wants one of his or her desires to be the one they act on. But *why* do they want this? What is it about that desire that gives rise to this identification? Could it be, for example that they simply *choose* that one desire rather than another will be the one they identify with? This suggestion is reminiscent of the Sartrean account of deliberation; the basis in both cases is radical choice. A similar picture is suggested by Fingarette’s account of “identification” in his book on self-deception<sup>18</sup>. He writes,

“ The phrase, “he identifies himself as”, certainly has some reference to discoveries the individual makes; but it refers as well to options adopted.” (p.68)

So we might think of identification in terms of “discovery” *or* in terms of an act of will.

But what would this latter option be like? It might be for example, that I am faced with two courses of action, one of which represents something I value, while the other will bring more pleasure but is not something I value. Here perhaps I may choose to “identify” myself with the first alternative. But in what sense is this really a *choice*? Clearly there *is* a choice, but it is a choice *based* on something. More specifically, it is based on the fact that I already face these two alternatives as distinct. The first is one with which I am *already* in a sense identified with- it is the one I value. This, though it issues in a choice, involves a *discovery*. If there were nothing my choice was based on, no *already-present* way things present themselves to me, it is hard to see how the choice could amount to much since it would be truly random, and so meaningless. This point was made in a previous section, and strongly suggests that what is involved in valuing something- what we might call the “phenomenology” of value- is *incompatible* with choice. I cannot *choose* to find something valuable. This is the same sort of incompatibility as we find between decision and belief; I cannot *decide* what to believe because the notion of belief involves being guided by how the world is<sup>19</sup>. And that is incompatible with simply

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<sup>18</sup> H. Fingarette, *Self Deception*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe”, in *Problems of the Self*.



*deciding* how things are. Such a decision could carry no conviction, and the same is true of any attempt to settle questions of value by acts of will.

We can now make a general point. When someone is identified with a value or a course of action this cannot be explained simply by acts of choice<sup>20</sup>. What is missing from any such an account is the acknowledgement that the person must, in order to *make* a real choice, already *see* things in a certain way. He must for example see one alternative as more valuable than another. This point does not simply involve assuming the falsity of subjectivism about value. Even on a Humean account, there is still a problem with the claim that values are *chosen*. The problem is that the emphasis on radical choice makes moral experience *active*, but the phenomenology of moral experience, as of belief, is *passive*. And this feature of passivity is the result of the fact that the various alternatives in a given situation *strike* us with their own force. In other words, there is a way we *perceive* the situation.

When we speak of someone being identified with a value or course of action we can, then, only explain this by referring to how he perceives the situation; but *that* could not be a matter of choice. Returning now to Frankfurt's picture of second order identification, what implications does the conclusion we have just reached have for it? First, as we have seen, since he merely says that the agent identifies with a second order desire this will either involve a simple act of *will*- in which case it will not have the necessary phenomenology - or it will be *more* than a simple decision because it will be supported by or based on the way things seem to the agent. But in *that* case the important stage of identification will already be assumed. *It* will be what explains the *decision*, not the other way around. We can see, therefore, that both Frankfurt and Sartre make a mistake in claiming that character can be grounded in this kind of choice<sup>21</sup>.

But in any case, there are other reasons why Frankfurt's analysis falls short of character. For one thing, he is quite explicit that the second order evaluations need not be consistent over time. The identifier can be capricious<sup>22</sup>;

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<sup>20</sup> This is also argued, also against the Sartrean position, by Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self", in Watson ed. *Free Will*.

<sup>21</sup> In one sense of course - one with which Aristotle would agree - character *is* founded in choice; we make decisions that affect the ways our characters develop. But this process, which is the process of educating character, involves educating our grasp of things. Choices are required but they function in a different way to Sartre's account.

<sup>22</sup> This objection to Frankfurt's account is made by Gabriele Taylor in *Pride, Shame and Guilt*.

“a person may be capricious and irresponsible in forming his second order volitions....second order volitions express evaluations only in the sense that they are preferences. There is no essential restriction on the kind of basis, if any, upon which they are formed.”

(p.13 n.6)

The difference between this view and the picture of the person of integrity, is that the latter's evaluations are based not merely on what he really- at that time - *prefers* but on what he sees as *valuable or good*. Making those kinds of judgements involves a commitment to the realism of the values ascribed,<sup>23</sup> and the demands of consistency. *Preference*, on the other hand, is notoriously fickle, and involves no commitment to consistency - either synchronically or diachronically. Frankfurt's identifier in fact lacks integrity, since he is- and sees himself as being- totally unconstrained by present preferences. Such an agent *need* not be inconsistent; he may in fact be consistently inconsistent. But he does not possess integrity.

Caprice of this sort is tolerable with respect to a large class of desires and preferences, and may even be *desirable* in the case of some of them. But with respect to *values* such as those involved in promises, obligations, emotional commitments to family, friends and lovers, such caprice is a failing. Frankfurt's capricious identifier is, however, still - minimally- an *identifier*. But it is equally clear that his identification is *shallow*, precisely because it *could* be based on an act of will. Does such a person possess character? Since there is nothing for him to be consistent *about*, except perhaps letting things be determined by his strongest preference, he cannot have integrity or character. And when an action is the product of integrated character, this seems to allow a deeper sense in which the action is “mine” than the capricious identifier, or wanton, can claim<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Some philosophers deny this; J. L. Mackie's well-known “error theory” about value was one he thought we could all come to embrace without seriously disturbing our moral practices. However, I do not think this view can be defended.

<sup>24</sup> This was in fact Frankfurt's aim; to show how a compatibilist defence of free will can fend off various counter examples by revealing the mechanism by which some desires, preferences and so on are “mine”. Thus, the kleptomaniac's desire, for example, is not really “his”. The same strategy, Frankfurt hoped, could show which emotional responses are really *mine*.



## When Are My Emotions Mine?

The points I have just been making about character and integrity can be thought of as offering one account of when it is that an action or desire is *mine* in a non-superficial sense. An akratic action is still of course the agent's action; it was still him who performed it. But it does not express the values he takes himself to hold, and so in a deeper sense is not "his". Equally, the drug addict or the alcoholic may wish to give up their addictions, but be unable to. Here again, we might say, there is a sense in which their course of action is not the result of a choice based on their evaluations, and so not really "theirs".

Compatibilist accounts of free will must make room for this fact, since their credibility rests on their ability to explain why certain causal antecedents of action and not others are consistent with free choice. Acting under coercion, for example, is the kind of case compatibilists typically rule out, but they must also accommodate the intuition that the alcoholic, the drug addict and the hypnotist's victim and other stock counter-examples are similarly not acting freely. Frankfurt's account of evaluative choice is an attempt to do this. His theory attempts to replace the traditional compatibilist criteria of "external" and "internal" antecedents of action with an account based on second-order evaluation. The promise of such an account is that it shows that an action's being mine is not simply a matter of it's being a product of my will or desire.

The connection between this issue and the subject of emotion is this; we need some account of when an emotional response is "mine" and when not. For just as there are cases of action which an agent can legitimately disclaim, so there are emotional responses of which the same is true. If, despite my avowed views to the contrary, I find myself laughing at a racist joke, or find myself horrified by the disclosure of your homosexuality, how should we describe my response? One option would be to take my responses as casting doubt on the sincerity of my avowed views. In this respect, the situation is similar to the case of recalcitrance, considered in chapter one. There, we concluded that the recalcitrant reaction need not cast doubt on the sincerity of my beliefs. That really *is* what

I believe, the difficulty is that my beliefs are not fully integrated with my emotions<sup>25</sup>. Another type of case are those in which my emotional responses are chemically induced, for example by alcohol, or more exotically perhaps, the example of drug-induced love in the story of Tristan and Isolde.

The account we have developed so far allows us to see how we might respond to such cases. Since they are not the product of my deepest evaluations, they are reactions that have somehow “escaped” me, and are not wholly mine. The two senses distinguished here in which an action or response can be mine - the sense in which it expresses my conception of myself, and the minimal sense in which it was me who acted or responded - find analogues in the case of shame and guilt. In a case of shame like Gabriel’s in chapter one, the agent identifies with his perception of himself and his situation. The object of his shame is *himself*; something about his true self has been revealed or discovered. In effect his shame is a recognition of *failing* by the standards of what he thinks truly important<sup>26</sup>. In cases of guilt however, the agent has done something which he regards as in some sense *alien* to him. His true self has *not* been revealed.

On the account we have given, then, it is possible to see why a variety of different emotional responses are felt to be “external” or not wholly mine. Phobics, for example, may experience various kinds of inability as a result of their fears- an inability to go near the edges of tall buildings, to walk in open spaces, or to go near a certain kind of animal- but the inability will be experienced as something *external* to them, as something they may wish to overcome. In short they do not see themselves *expressed in* their emotions. Things are importantly different, however, in cases of another kind of inability or incapacity. These are the cases of “practical necessity” which were mentioned above, and to which I now turn.

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<sup>25</sup> This is reminiscent of Nussbaum’s point (see n. 11 above) that complete integration requires more than just beliefs. This point is of importance for any account of emotional education.

<sup>26</sup> This point is made by Gabrielle Taylor in *Pride, Shame and Guilt*.



## Practical Necessity and Moral Incapacity.

The term “practical necessity” refers to cases in which, when faced with a choice, the agent experiences one alternative as the one he *must* choose, or, alternatively, as one he *cannot* possibly perform. Bernard Williams offers as examples<sup>27</sup> the case of Luther refusing to renounce his views in front of the emperor Charles the Fifth, and the eponymous Ajax in Sophocles’ tragedy, resolving that he must take his own life. The experience of practical necessity, however is not merely the recognition of what, all things considered, we *ought* (morally speaking) to do or refrain from doing, such as that I ought to give money to famine relief. It is consistent with *that* conclusion that the other alternatives remain *viable* alternatives (giving the money instead to cancer research, for example) . In cases of practical necessity, on the other hand, the other alternatives become things the agent simply *cannot* do. It is also noteworthy that while practical necessity is a recognition of what one must *do*, rather than what one must *feel* (feelings, after all, are not actions) it is not a “cool” intellectual judgement. Rather, it is essentially *affective*, we are aware of it *through* our emotional responses.

One crucial point about this sense of necessity or incapacity, which bears on the discussion in the previous section, is that the agent feels constrained; he experiences a necessity or incapacity, but he does not feel it as a constraint *externally* imposed. By contrast, the cases of phobias *are* felt as “external”. An indication of this is that in the latter cases the person may try to *overcome* his inability and wish that he could succeed. But this wish is typically absent in cases of moral incapacity; the agent does not wish to be able to do what he finds he cannot. The distinction between moral incapacity and other incapacities such as phobias, is the difference between incapacities we are merely subject to (such as phobias) and incapacities which are essential to our moral character. Moral character, as already discussed, is something which I have chosen, *insofar as* my choices and decisions helped form it through time. And it is this factor which makes it distinct

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<sup>27</sup> In “Practical Necessity” and “Moral Incapacity” (Op. Cit).

from merely psychological incapacities, and explains why I do not wish to become capable in these respects. To want to overcome a moral incapacity is in a sense already to have lost it.<sup>28</sup>

Williams is clear that practical necessity at least (unlike moral incapacity) is not concerned with narrowly "moral" concerns such as obligations;

"One point... is that there is nothing special about *moral* necessity, in any of the narrower senses of that expression which relates specially to such things as obligation; though there may be a broader sense- an ultimately broad sense, relating to character and action- in which all really serious examples of such necessities are moral necessities."<sup>29</sup>

So practical necessity *need* not be about *narrowly* moral demands. It *may* be of course; I may feel I *must* save the drowning child. In such moral cases there seems to be a quite clear *source* for the agent's sense that he would not attempt to overcome the sense of necessity; for instance the thought that *not* to feel that he must save the child would be *wrong*. In that case to imagine overcoming the disposition is to imagine being the kind of person who was disposed to do what was morally *wrong*, and this is a possibility the moral agent cannot endorse. Part of what it is to think that an action is morally right, then, is just this kind of identification with it. But the wider sense of "moral" suggested by Williams - which is closer to Aristotle's sense of the *ethical*- covers all "serious" examples of practical necessity : which is just to say that all cases of practical necessity are the result of *character* and are therefore based on the kind of settled perceptions considered previously.

What, then, if anything, do the experiences of practical necessity and moral incapacity imply about our emotional life? What, first, of the connection between these experiences and the possession of character? Can we claim that the experience of Practical Necessity is a *necessary condition* of character? This conclusion, however, would be too strong. Character requires that the agent values a range of goods, and that he is faithful to these evaluations in the face of other, less valued though attractive, goods. So it requires not "giving in", a firm sense of what is important, and so on. But this is compatible with the agent's deliberation being made up exclusively of deliberation about what the agent

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<sup>28</sup> This point is made by Craig Taylor in his helpful discussion, "Moral Incapacity" *Philosophy* 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Practical Necessity p.127.



“ought” to do. Respecting and being faithful to what he values, then, does not require an additional sense that some things are simply not options, things the agent *couldn't* do.

Is the experience of practical necessity then merely an optional extra, something tacked on to our moral psychology once the important work has all been done? We can answer this question by imagining what it would be like to lack the experience of practical necessity. Fortunately there is a figure, familiar from moral philosophy, who can serve as a model in this thought experiment- the utilitarian. To begin with, it is clear that the utilitarian can have character in the sense discussed so far. He is committed to the pursuit of the general happiness, and so long as he is faithful to this goal in ways already discussed, that is sufficient for the possession of character. But would the utilitarian experience practical necessity? With one possible exception, (to be discussed below) the answer must be that he would not. The reason for this is that the utilitarian is committed to the maximisation of general utility and therefore approaches any situation with that as his moral goal<sup>30</sup>. Ideally, therefore, when he surveys his options, he is drawn to the course of action that maximises utility. But since it is an entirely contingent and variable matter which option that will turn out to be, his other allegiances, emotional and otherwise, can only be *provisional*. Should he be called upon, in the name of utility-maximisation, to sacrifice a friendship, or save an important scientist rather than his wife, say, then this is what he will do. The theory can permit him some regret about the sacrifices which the demands of morality force upon him, but these are merely cosmetic so far as the theory is concerned<sup>31</sup>. What the theory cannot allow him is any sense that some options are unconditionally “off limits”, and this amounts to a ruling that the experience of practical necessity is mistaken, even self-indulgent<sup>32</sup>.

The one possible exception to this picture is that of general utility itself, since it is the one thing which is *unconditionally* good as far as the utilitarian is concerned. Perhaps the utilitarian could feel he *must* maximise utility, and thus would at least experience practical necessity about something. Whether this is so or not, in all other respects the utilitarian's experience must lack practical necessity and moral incapacity, because the utilitarian theory demands that agents perceive the quantity of utility produced by a course of action as the most salient feature of any situation. And that precludes the unconditional nature of

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<sup>30</sup> This is true only of act utilitarians. Rule utilitarianism may make different psychological allowances.

<sup>31</sup> Exactly what they are as far as the *agent* is concerned is less clear.

<sup>32</sup> Williams discusses this charge in “Utilitarianism and Self-indulgence” in *Moral Luck*.

moral incapacity. But this raises the question of what sort of emotional attachments a utilitarian can have. Since, for most of us, the feature of unconditionality is one that characterises our most intimate emotional relationships. The person who did not feel that he “must” save his wife, whatever the other options, as in Williams’ example, would, we feel, be in a different sort of relationship to most of us. And similar points apply to friendships and other family relations.

It is difficult to imagine what such relationships would be like, and no doubt the nature of human relationships varies through place and time. Eighteenth century people, for example, frequently gave several of their children the same name, aware that high rates of infant mortality would mean that many of them would perish<sup>33</sup>. And in the same period marriages for different sorts of convenience, rather than love, seem to have been more prevalent than today. Given such facts, it may be that the meaning of emotional ties was different. Perhaps it is only with the rise of the concept of the “Individual”, with its various metaphysical and moral/political associations, that emotional ties as we know them really begin. That is debatable, but the point we can make with confidence is that such ideas are part of *our* sense of the meaning of emotional ties.

Let me then try to sum up this discussion of character and practical necessity. I will single out five points.

1) First of all, we have established a claim about character; that it cannot be explained simply as a product of *will*, although it is true that we make decisions which influence the development of our character. These decisions involve what I attempt to learn, to be open to, and become. Character, in short, concerns the education of perception. It follows from this that the Sartrean objection to Aristotle is mistaken.

2) Secondly, character itself involves integrity and an interconnected sense of the value of different goods. Character therefore involves the education of our emotional responses in line with our evaluations. This fact allows us to begin to distinguish emotional responses which are *mine* merely in the sense that I have them, and those that are mine in a more substantial sense. This distinction involves the sense that I am identified in a substantial sense with my responses and actions.

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<sup>33</sup> These and other facts are recounted by Lawrence Stone in *Sex and Marriage in Eighteenth Century England*’.



3) A third conclusion we have reached in this section has been that a range of necessities and incapacities involve just this sense of identification. Practical necessity and moral incapacity therefore presuppose character. Moral incapacity, furthermore is an incapacity which is *mine* in a sense in which other incapacities - such as those which result from phobias- are not.

4) Fourthly, these incapacities are a consequence of the nature of a wide range of our emotional ties; in fact they are a necessary feature of them.

5) To these points we can add a fifth; that while character is not sufficient for a sense of the importance of emotional ties which gives rise to moral incapacity, the process through which this sense is acquired, is a *cognitive* one. This conclusion follows naturally from the claim that the emotional ties of utilitarians, say, are constitutively different ; they do not regard their friends, loved-ones and so on, in the same way.<sup>34</sup> This point is consistent with the strong cognitivism outlined in chapter two; those who lack the emotional affects which are constitutive of personal relations cannot have the same cognitive attitude towards others as those who do not lack them.

## Reflection and Justification.

One question we might ask in the face of these claims is how exactly the notion of justification fits in. I cited earlier Williams' example of the man who saves his wife. His thought here is not, as Williams says, about what he would be justified in doing in that case;

“...surely *this* is a justification on behalf of the rescuer, that the person he chose to rescue was his wife? It depends how much weight is carried by “justification” ; the

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<sup>34</sup> Exactly how they are different is another question. Is it the idea of “uniqueness” that they lack, the sense of being irreplaceable? Plato, for example, argues in the Symposium, that we should regard loved-ones and lovers as merely poor reflections of something else, the Form. They become then, mere universals and dispensable. This is one way to understand what is lacking, but not the only one.

consideration that it was his wife is certainly, for instance, an explanation which should silence comment. But something more ambitious than this is usually intended, essentially involving the idea that moral principle can legitimate his preference, yielding the conclusion that in situations of this kind it is at least all right...to save one's wife...But this construction provides the agent with one thought too many; it might have been hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife."<sup>35</sup>

Williams seems to be right here that the simplified thought is morally preferable. But how can we combine this with the thought that, as Aristotle puts it, the good man does what is good *because* it is good. The would seem to involve exactly the kind of construction that Williams' case rules out. To act out of love or friendship is essentially to be moved because it is *that* particular person, and not that person *as an instance of* something more general. But how do we get from this thought to a justification? Once we start introducing general considerations of whatever sort which connect with the particular thought, then my deliberation starts to take on the morally suspect form. But the problem is that justification is *essentially* general. If *I* am justified in saving *my* friend it can only be because "*people* are justified in saving *their* friends" (all things being equal.). But reference to that justifying thought disqualifies my action from being one motivated by friendship. Philip Pettit<sup>36</sup> puts the point as follows,

"The need for a rigidly individualised reason connects with the fact that to act out of a commitment to love- to act out of a recognition of the consideration that justifies the action; *that* this is someone I love- is not to act out of a lover's commitment, a commitment to the beloved. For justification always abstracts away from particularity and when I say that I love someone in justifying what I did, the identity of the particular individual in question is not relevant; all that is essential to the justification is *that* it is an act of love. To act out of a recognition of that justifying consideration then, would not be to act on the basis of a reason that is rigidly individualised in favour of the beloved. It would be to fail to register the sort of thing that is part and parcel of thinking as a lover."

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<sup>35</sup>"Persons, Character and Morality", p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Pettit, "Love and its Place in Moral Discourse". In Lamb (ed.) *Love Analysed*. 1997.



In fact the problem we are faced with here is one we have met before, in chapter one and again in chapter three. In chapter one we considered Davidson's view of emotions as a syllogism with minor and major premises, and ultimately rejected it. I followed Gabriele Taylor in denying the need for a universal general premise. Instead there was an understanding of the particular. The general syllogistic picture of understanding was attacked again in chapter three, where an alternative account was offered in the form of Dancy's "particularism". Here we now find that the syllogistic model also faces acute difficulties when it attempts to capture some forms of ethical reflection. In Williams's example, the rescuer's experience has intentional content, but the focus of that content is his wife. It is his experience of *her* that generates the sense of necessity, not his appeal to moral rules. As for Aristotle, what Aristotle was right to emphasise is that the good person is educated to be motivated by the right sorts of concerns. Seeing things in the correct way, he is moved to act by the right things. In that sense he does what is good *because* it is good. But that it *is* good, is revealed to him *in* his experience of it, just as the rescuer's grasp of what is important is present in his experience of the situation. Neither the rescuer nor the virtuous man need appeal to rules, principles, or other considerations outside their experience of the situation for them to be motivated by what is good.

We have now completed our reply to the attack on the notion of character and its relation to emotion which was the basis of the Aristotelian account of the value of emotion. I shall now return to that account and attempt to add a little more detail to it. We have already seen that a feature of Aristotle's picture of integrity is that the agent has an integrated sense of the value of different goods. This faculty of practical wisdom Aristotle calls *phronesis*. One question I will address shortly is whether it is correct to think of this as a purely "intellectual" faculty. A second issue is the role of learning and education in Aristotle's theory. If, as he believed, education is essential to virtue, and that emotion can be educated, what is involved in this process? This is the question I turn to next.

## Learning to be Good

So far I have argued that establishing habits of emotional response, perception and action are what constitute character. In this way character is the expression of ethical understanding. So the question arises how we acquire this understanding; what is the learning process through which character is achieved? Aristotle claims that a crucial component of this process is *practice*- we only learn to be just by *doing* just acts; we learn what is kind by *doing* what is kind. He suggests that the acquisition of virtue can be understood by analogy with the development of the skills required for a craft;

“We acquire the virtues by first acting just as we do in the case of acquiring crafts. For we learn a craft by making the products which we must make once we have learned the craft...so too we become just by doing just actions, and temperate by doing temperate actions... and, in a word, states of character are formed out of corresponding acts.”<sup>37</sup>

However this claim is not unproblematic. Why, for example, does moral knowledge *have* to be acquired in this way? It is important to emphasise that Aristotle does not see the aim of activity as merely that of putting into practice knowledge already grasped by other means. On such a view, the practice would not itself be a *learning* process. It could at best be a learning *how to*, process; the process of learning how to put the knowledge already possessed into effect. This might involve subduing unruly desires and passions and generally facilitating the role, within our psychology, of the intellectual element of the psyche.

But this is not Aristotle's view. In the first place, it construes the process of habituation as what Rosalind Hursthouse<sup>38</sup> dubs “horse-breaking”. The subjugation and alteration of existing desires and passions proceeds simply by force, on this view; there is no re-education, no *learning* in the activity. But as Hursthouse points out, such a process could never amount to what Aristotle calls virtue, since the virtuous person takes *pleasure* in his

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<sup>37</sup> N. E. 1103a31-b21.

<sup>38</sup> Hursthouse, “Moral Habituation”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1988.



actions. At best this process would produce the enkratic agent, but no process of enforced practice alone could result in the virtuous person's perception that just acts are truly pleasant. But secondly, this account implies that what must be properly *learned*, as opposed to what must be enforced, can be learned by other means and that activity itself contributes nothing essential to such a process. But Aristotle insists that this is not the case;

“Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject....Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life but its discussions start from these and are about these; and further, since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be vain and unprofitable....Hence anyone who is to listen to lectures about what is noble and just, and generally about the subjects of political science, must have been brought up in good habits. For “The that! Is the starting point, and if this is sufficiently apparent, he will not need “The because” as well; and the man who has been well brought up has, or can easily get starting points.” (N.E. 1094b28- 1095b8)

Not only is mere propositional understanding insufficient for virtue, but argument and what can be learned from books and lectures will all be quite useless unless the person has been brought up with the correct habits. The point is not that without correct training what is learned will not be *effective*, but that without a correct training, what is learnt will - from the student's perspective - lack any point. And this means that the process of habituation must be a learning process<sup>39</sup> in the full sense that it provides a necessary basis for seeing the point of lectures such as Aristotle's. Furthermore, Aristotle thinks that if the training is not carried out when young the opportunity is lost. Aristotle is much more sceptical about the education or re-education of adults than were, say, the Stoics (see below).

If then it is Aristotle's view that we *learn* through doing, we must explain how this is so. The claim is at least initially surprising, for, as Burnyeat<sup>40</sup> remarks, is it not one thing to learn to *do* what is noble and just but quite another to learn *that* it is just? In response

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<sup>39</sup> The point is also made by Myles Burnyeat, “On Learning to be Good” (p.73), in Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle*.

<sup>40</sup> Burnyeat (Op. Cit.)

Burnyeat suggests<sup>41</sup> that the key to understanding Aristotle's idea is the role of pleasure. As already noted, the virtuous person is distinguished from the enkratic by taking pleasure in virtuous acts, and taking pleasure in an action requires *doing* the action. There is a weak sense of "learn" in which I can *learn*, for example, *that* very hot things can be painful or that skiing is enjoyable or that temperance is pleasant where this means simply that I have acquired the information, regardless of my personal experience of these things. In a stronger sense, however, I only learn these things by *experiencing* the pain of very hot things and the pleasure of skiing and temperate action. We might wonder whether this counts as real learning; but we have already seen that there is a comparable difference between the blind and sighted person as regards their knowledge of colour. Were the blind man to see the colour green, he *would* have learned something new about that colour, but not something propositional.

Someone may learn- in the weak sense- that an action is just, but this will mean simply that they have acquired that information. But learning that an action is just in the stronger sense will require performing just actions and coming to take the appropriate kind of pleasure in them. In short then, learning in this sense, involves time and practice, so the initial oddity of Aristotle's claim, with which we started, disappears.

There are nevertheless still legitimate questions we might raise about the details of the process; how does a parent break the hold of an undesirable passion or a stubborn desire in a child? If the goal is that the child will take pleasure in selfless or generous action, say, a first step will involve displacing the unpleasant nature of generous action as the child now experiences it. One way to achieve this is to enable the child to conceive the situation in other terms. Sarah Broadie writes;

"The human ability to see things in other and wider terms is such that a child's interest in a mundane objective like finishing the food on his plate or getting dressed or helping a younger child to dress can easily at the same time be an interest in doing something neatly, doing something right, getting something right oneself, not disgracing the family, being responsible for someone else, preparing now for the future, respecting others by using properly what they have made..."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> And following him, Nancy Sherman in "The Fabric of Character" Ch. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, (p. 108).



Broadie comments that here there is the potential for a variety of virtues, depending which construction of the situation is emphasised. It is the imaginative capacity for the re-organisation of perception and experience which makes this possible. In Broadie's view it teaches children two valuable lessons. First, that what it is appropriate to do is not always or usually what we feel like doing. Second, that given the variety of features which can be made salient, what it is appropriate to do may not be what we think obvious, even with a cultivated eye. This, she says, "contains seeds of the general openness that should save one from mechanical adherence even to higher values". The general point is that one way to displace an unpleasant experience of an action is to offer an alternative construal of it, under which the experience is transformed. It may yet be enkratically performed, but it is a first step.

## Phronesis and Emotion.

Moving on then from the general methodological claim that learning essentially involves activity, we might ask what the *content* of ethical education is and when it begins. Richard Sorabji's<sup>43</sup> answer is that it may begin with the father saying to the young man, "this is what courage (or, more generally, what virtue and *to kalon* ) requires of us now". This however implies a narrow understanding of the *ethical*. Hursthouse comments;

"Sorabji here falls prey to the common tendency to think of moral or ethical education as the teaching of the moral or "ethical" in our sense. But ethical education in Aristotle is education and formation of character, the training of the passions; it does not exclusively involve the teaching of what is good or bad or morally pleasant or unpleasant, but the teaching of the truly good and the truly pleasant *simpliciter*."<sup>44</sup>

Since education of character does not involve the inculcation of principles or rules but resistance to certain forms of pleasure and the indulgence of the emotions, does it not proceed in a haphazard fashion? Most importantly, perhaps, what guarantees the end result will be *coherent*? Aristotle at this point calls upon the virtuous person's possession of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to ensure that the resulting complex issues in appropriate action in the right situation. It is through his possession of *phronesis* that the virtuous man knows what is appropriate (N.E. 1141b14-16). But what is *phronesis* really? We have

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect" in Rorty ed. (Op. Cit.), quoted in Hursthouse.

<sup>44</sup> Hursthouse, (Op. Cit. p 212). The same point is made by Bernard Williams, in "Morality and the Emotions" (p.225) in *Problems of the Self*.



already seen that it is not taught separately- it is not the grasp of rules or principles of ranking, say, of the various goods. It involves perhaps an implicit grasp of the relative values of different goods. This is certainly a part of what Aristotle has in mind, but it is not all. Amelie Rorty writes,

“...*phronesis* is an umbrella term for a wide range of independent traits that enable a person to see and to actualise the goods that can best be realised in extremely varied, particular contexts...Since *phronesis* combines a range of independent intellectual and character traits- ingenuity, insight, perceptual sensitivity, acuity in inference, a sound sense of relevance, an active understanding of the relative importance of heterogeneous and sometimes incommensurable ends, allocating different priorities to the various components ...could sometimes lead to different action outcomes.”<sup>45</sup>

Exactly how this problem might be solved is a difficult question, but not one I shall, or need to, answer here. I wish merely to focus on a narrower point concerning *phronesis*, namely that - as Rorty's remarks show - it is not merely an *intellectual* capacity. Some of the abilities Rorty lists *can* be classed as “intellectual”, such as insight and acuity in inference. But one in particular cannot; that is a sense of what emotional reaction is appropriate to a given situation. It seems clear that a Mr. Spock would at best be able to infer from the practices of others what *they* thought was appropriate. But is this not too presumptuous? In a case of grief, say, might Spock not *reason* that the loss of a loved one is the loss of someone held to be of great importance and who is, for practical purposes, unique and irreplaceable. Given this, mild emotion would be inappropriate. So he *could* after all reach a judgement about what the correct response was.

First of all, it is clear that the “conclusion” that mild emotion would be inappropriate, does not follow deductively from what precedes it. That is not surprising. But then what sense could Spock have that it *is* inappropriate? It seems the only basis there could be for such a supposition is that those who respond in that way seem to think it *is* appropriate? Even if someone who did not feel grief went through the steps attributed to Mr. Spock, and reached the conclusion that grief was appropriate, what would still be missing would presumably be - although there might be other explanations- that his experience of the person who has died was not of the right sort. And “right sort” here must mean, of the

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<sup>45</sup> Rorty, “Virtues and their Vicissitudes” (p.140), in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol.13.



right *emotional* sort. We grieve for those with whom we have emotional ties, and it is those ties that make sense of grief. This perfectly obvious fact means that for Mr. Spock there could not *be* a sense in which grief was appropriate. The derivative inference above can only track the experience of others, but not his own.

We can also bring out a further point; the appropriateness of emotional responses depends on a grasp of the value of the good in question. But grasping the value of friendship, say, requires experience of that emotional relationship. Or, to take another example, the value of love as a good is not something that Mr. Spock could readily grasp. But could he not have *some* sense of its value? After all, many of us have some idea of the value of various forms of love - romantic love, for example- before actually *experiencing* them. As La Rochefoucauld quipped, nobody would place such a premium on love who had not first read about it in the pages of novels. But the experience acquired in this way, albeit in advance of experiencing the emotion oneself for a particular individual, is not an affectless experience. It remains unclear, then, how Mr. Spock would rank the claims of friendship, the demands of a promise and a concern for the feelings of others. Is it credible that anyone could rank these in *any* appropriate order who had no sense of the emotional significance of each?<sup>46</sup> This conclusion is consonant with Aristotle's insistence upon the importance of emotional response for virtuous character, and also with the claim made in chapter two that emotions offer a distinct cognitive grasp of things.

The points made so far have a bearing on another question which arises in connection with the relation between *phronesis* and the virtues; the claim that the virtues are *unified*-to have one virtue is to have all of them. If we take the virtue of courage as an example, we can see that an action only counts as the exercise of that virtue if the person is correct in judging that what he is engaged in is sufficiently valuable to be *worth* risking the danger. If this is not so, then he is foolhardy rather than brave. Sorabji,<sup>47</sup> who presents the

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<sup>46</sup> A side issue which arises at this point is; how explicit, or articulated does the agent's conception of the good need to be? Annas, in *The Morality of Happiness* (p.73) suggests that the phronimos has a sense of the role of a given good in the good life. A similar picture of the virtuous agent is found in Charles Taylor's "Self-Interpreting Animals", where Taylor argues that what he calls "strong evaluation" is a necessary condition of living the good life. Strong evaluation however, involves, a fairly high degree of articulation and self-awareness; as Taylor puts it, it involves "drawing a moral map". Owen Flanagan is critical of this account of virtue. Using the example of Tolstoy's "simple peasants", he argues that such people usually have not evaluated their lives contrastively in Taylor's sense, and may be incapable of doing so. Yet they possess moral goodness. (Cf. Flanagan, "Identity and Strong and Weak Evaluation". In Flanagan and Rorty, *Identity, Character and Morality*.)

<sup>47</sup> Sorabji, (Op. Cit.)



example of courage, concludes; "So we cannot know what courage requires of us now without knowing what the good life in general requires." Sorabji suggests that this consideration is sufficient to establish the thesis of the unity of the virtues. However, as several writers<sup>48</sup> have pointed out, the thesis of the unity of the virtues involves not just the claim that possessing one virtue requires *phronesis* (and therefore that the person concerned will have a correct estimation about the value of *all* goods ); the claim about the unity of the virtues goes beyond this and claims *in addition* that the person with one virtue has *all the virtues*. But possessing *phronesis* is not yet to possess all the virtues. So Sorabji's point can be granted without that entailing the unity of the virtues. Objecting to the thesis that the virtues are unified, Julia Annas says,

"The thought is that if I really have the virtue of good-temperedness, then I have a correct understanding of the contribution this virtue makes to my overall good; but I cannot have this without also understanding the contribution that any virtue makes to my good. But should it follow from this that if I have one virtue I have them all? Could I not have the intellectual basis of the other virtues- the grasp of what they contribute to the agent's good, which enables the agent to make correct judgements in their case- but not have the appropriate emotions and feelings?" (Annas, p.77)

Annas is right that Sorabji's point does not establish the unity of the virtues. But her reason for thinking so is that *phronesis* is an intellectual capacity, and so you can have all the relevant knowledge but simply not have the relevant emotions<sup>49</sup>. A similar kind of point is made by Elizabeth Telfer<sup>50</sup>, who argues that the only way to defend the Aristotelian distinction between the *phronimos* and the continent man while maintaining that the practically wise man must have all the virtues is to show how the distinction

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Telfer, "The Unity of the Moral Virtues", *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society* 1989. And Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*.

<sup>49</sup> As this suggests, Annas (Op. Cit. p. 63-5) finds the importance ascribed by Aristotle to the emotions a little puzzling. Her conclusion is that they serve only as spurs to action, and that the truly virtuous person should not really need them. Annas therefore assumes an account of emotions- according to which they offer no unique cognitive grasp- which I have already rejected. Given such an account it would be puzzling what contribution they make. This point is also made by Nancy Sherman in her review article on Annas in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1994. Sherman also rejects Annas' account of the emotions.

<sup>50</sup> Telfer (Op. Cit.) p.39.



between them in terms of pleasure taken in their activity is *also* a difference in what they *know*. For if the continent man knows what the virtuous man knows, then those who possess *phronesis* may *not* possess all the virtues (as the continent man does not). And if that is so, the argument for the unity of the virtues collapses. But the problem she perceives for such a strategy lies in showing how the knowledge of the continent man falls short of that of the virtuous man. The obvious candidate here is that the continent man lacks the cognitive grasp of the virtuous man, and this grasp comes out simply in their cognitive construals of the actions as pleasant and unpleasant. Indeed this is precisely Burnyeat's argument, considered above. But Telfer writes,

“To think mistakenly that temperate actions are unpleasant might be to fail to realise that in Aristotle's objective sense of pleasant...temperate actions are truly pleasant and the self-controlled person's delight in excess is an aberration. This mistake would be a false belief, the kind of mistake which might appropriately be attributed to a limitation of moral knowledge amounting to a lack of practical wisdom. But it is not a mistake which the self-controlled person necessarily makes.” (p.41)

It is correct that this is a belief that the continent man may have. And it is equally right that possession of such a belief does not make him virtuous. However Telfer concludes that this discredits the option of showing the continent man to lack knowledge. But the questionable assumption is the one made in the quotation above, that the deficiency must be a missing *belief*. It will not be necessary to rehearse here the arguments from previous chapters against the assumption that what is cognitive must be a belief; what the blind man lacks is not *beliefs* about colour. And if this assumption is rejected we can see how, as has already been argued, coming to experience something as pleasant is learning.

The point of considering the arguments of Annas and Telfer has not been to claim that the doctrine of the unity of the virtues is in fact correct. I have not been trying to settle that issue. Rather my aim has been to illustrate ways in which we can think of *phronesis* in Aristotle's account. Contrary to what both Annas and Telfer suggest, I am claiming that we should think of it - at least in part- as an emotional faculty, and not merely an intellectual one. Furthermore, although Sorabji's point does not establish the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, it does show that *phronesis* involves the ability to perceive when a given value - such as risking danger - is worthwhile and when not. In other words, *phronesis* involves the ability to perceive the *salient* features of any particular situation; it



is understanding focused on *particular* cases in the way I have argued for in previous chapters.

The arguments of this chapter have so far been aimed at defending the claim that the emotions are of ethical importance. Various attacks have been repelled- in the form of arguments concerning impartiality, the capriciousness of our emotions, the freedom of human choice, and the intellectual nature of practical wisdom. If the defence has been successful, however, there still remains the question of whether *all* our ethical values are rooted in emotional responses. So far I have claimed merely that some or many of them are. Are there then, values which do not require an emotional basis?

## Emotion-Free Values?

I have so far argued that grasping the value of relationships such as friendship and love requires experience of the relevant emotional states. Agamemnon's failure to grasp the nature of his deeds and the true nature of his loss is rooted in his lack of emotional experience. This involves the claim that emotion provides a distinct cognitive grasp of things. But this is true not only of these relationships, but of other things we value as well. Just as our empathy for someone who is grieving requires some understanding of what grief is, so our desire to help usually springs from our being affected by their suffering. The idea that we should want to help out of *a sense of duty* has been accepted within the Kantian tradition as a desirable ideal. But as Peter Winch<sup>51</sup> and others have argued, this picture of moral agency has an inhuman face.

No doubt people often do act morally, not out of passionate conviction or fellow feeling, but out of a conventional sense of what is required. In Aristotle's terms, however, this is *not* virtuous action precisely because it lacks the correct motivation. I assume, then, that in addition to the cases of love and friendship it is plausible to claim for these cases too that an emotional response is the appropriate motivational basis. Nevertheless, it is surely too strict a demand that every "moral" action spring from emotion. Sometimes emotions *are* fickle, and we may on occasion do what we think we *ought* to, aware and even uneasy at our absence of any accompanying emotional motivation. But this need not make the action morally worthless. In other cases, such as giving money to charity, the absence of an immediate object helps to explain why we may fall back on a sense that we *should* act, rather than from any occurrent emotion. In these cases, we *should* be prepared to recognise the possibility of engaging in moral reflection without emotion. This much was implicit in Rorty's list of the various capacities of *phronesis*; acuity in making inferences, for example, is not an emotional capacity. And someone deciding whether to give money to a charity might deliberate well without being in an affected state.

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Winch. "Moral Integrity". As an example of the Kantian moral agent, Winch offers the example of Mrs. Solness from Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, "I'll do my best for you. That's no more than my duty". Winch is generally suspicious of the idea that we should help others and promote what is valuable *because* we see it as our duty.



Michael Stocker<sup>52</sup> argues that there are cases of deliberation about the demands of justice which do not require emotional engagement either. Notoriously, issues of justice, whether legal, political or moral, generally *do* arouse strong emotional responses. But Stocker offers the example of whether I should pay my taxes. Surely, Stocker asks, I can deliberate about this effectively and correctly while remaining emotionally neutral? This is no doubt correct, but in admitting it are we thereby forced to concede that there are important values which are not based on emotional responses? I don't think, however, that these examples show that. In the example of giving money to charity, what requires deliberation is perhaps *whether* to give, or *which* charity to give to. But what underlies this deliberation is a concern to alleviate suffering. Now we can allow that I can deliberate about how best to achieve this end in the absence of emotion. But what about the suffering itself? Can I be unaffected by *that*? Or in the tax example, I can work out dispassionately what justice demands as regards paying for social services and amenities. But is our concern with this issue dispassionate all the way down? It is reasonable to think that here, as in the charity example, there is some ground level value with which we *are* emotionally engaged. If it turns out that, confronted with the suffering which I regard it as my duty to alleviate, I remain unmoved, it will begin to be mysterious what my sense of duty amounts to. The idea that we abstractly and by reason alone discern what duty requires is extremely opaque, and Kant's own attempts to elucidate it are, by common agreement, a failure. In addition to his unworkable picture of the moral self, the Kantian account conceives the moral agent trying to "track" duty by means of a rational *procedure*, and this inferential relation to the situation itself results in an unappealing double-vision.

I conclude then that the role I have claimed for emotion is not affected by counter-examples of the sort Stocker offers. We should not expect that every *action* or every piece of moral *reflection* springs from emotion. But this does not effect the claim that what we think intrinsically valuable has a basis in emotional responses. This concludes my presentation and defence of the Aristotelian account of the role and value of emotion. I now turn to the first of two theories which embody views very different, and indeed opposed to Aristotle's. The first of these, which I will consider in the next section, is Stoicism, and the second, which I consider in the next chapter is Romanticism.

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<sup>52</sup> Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*.

## Stoicism

We have now built up a picture of what -at least for Aristotle- the role of emotion in relation to the ethical is. Elements of this picture involve the connection between virtue and character as manifested through consistent emotional reactions; the relationship between the unified grasp of what is valuable (*phronesis*) and the emotions themselves; and the process of refinement of the emotions through practice or habituation. On this view, having the right sort of emotional response is necessary for virtue, and this because virtue requires activity, and activity undertaken in the right affective spirit. It is time now to turn to the rival account of the significance of the emotions offered by the Stoics.

The popular sense of the term “Stoic” is of someone who faces what befalls him unflinchingly and without complaint. But it is not so well known perhaps that this state of equanimity is to be achieved, according to the Stoics, by the extirpation of the emotions. That is to say, we must renounce our emotional attachments to things in the world- to people, to wealth, pleasure, to everything in fact with the exception of virtue, in order to achieve the desired peace of mind. For the Stoics, it is through our emotional attachments that we become disturbed by loss, frustrated, vulnerable and ultimately unhappy<sup>53</sup>. Stoicism then stands for a withdrawal of sorts, a contraction of the sphere of what is valuable, and the Stoics believed that if we are to accomplish this we must engage in philosophical therapy. This ethical theory takes a very different view of emotion to the

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<sup>53</sup> The Stoics attempt to mitigate the counter-intuitive nature of these claims by allowing that although of no real value - these goods are classed as “Indifferents”- they may legitimately be *preferred*. Exactly how coherent this doctrine of the Preferred Indifferents can be made is not obvious. If the goods really are without value, why is it legitimate to prefer them? Terence Irwin discusses the issue in “Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness” in Schofield and Striker (eds.) *The Norms of Nature*. The contrast with Aristotle is particularly marked in the case of love and friendship, since there is evidence that Aristotle regarded relationships with others not merely as one good among many, but the *supreme* good; “For without friends no one would choose to live though he had all other goods.”(N.E. 1155a4-5). Though the other goods may have intrinsic value, if they are not shared, they become worthless. See Nancy Sherman’s discussion, in *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, ch.5.



one we find in Aristotle, and it has had considerable influence on some subsequent theories, most notably Kant's.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to their view of the *value* of emotion, they also held important views on the *nature* of emotions, and lying behind both these claims is a general psychological theory which describes the psyche, not as divided into warring factions, as it is in Plato's Republic, but as unified by reason. At least one modern philosopher has tried to defend the Stoic account of the nature of emotions<sup>55</sup>, but their view of the nature of human happiness and the place in it of emotion continues to be regarded as mistaken. I shall try to show that the Stoic view is mistaken in all three of the claims listed above.

I will begin with the point upon which the whole Stoic theory appears to hang; the value of self-sufficiency. Aristotle claimed that emotional commitment to various goods was an essential ingredient of the good life. And he acknowledged that this makes people vulnerable to the contingencies of the world, above all to the loss of family and loved ones. A vivid illustration of this is the case of Priam. Aristotle comments;

“For there is required, as we said, not only complete virtue but also a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan cycle; and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy”.

(N.E.1 1099b32)

Such misfortune is not *deserved*; it is not a reward for virtue or a punishment for vice. It is a matter of luck whether it befalls you or not. But it effects whether you can be happy or not. In this respect Aristotle recognises that the good man, by finding things emotionally valuable, makes himself vulnerable to their loss. Virtue, therefore, does not guarantee happiness, which is dependent on factors subject to luck. In short, the virtuous man is not self-sufficient, and this fact makes him vulnerable to reversals of fortune.

Plato had previously and famously argued that virtue *was* a guarantee of happiness. The good man, no matter what fate befalls him - whether torture or even death- remains

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<sup>54</sup> Nancy Sherman details some of the historical and theoretical links between Kant and the Stoics in *Making a Necessity of Virtue*.

<sup>55</sup> Martha Nussbaum. Cf. “The Stoics and The Extirpation of the Passions”, in *The Therapy of Desire*. Nussbaum finds the Stoic account of what emotions are attractive, but *not* their estimation of their value.

*unharméd*. In his most extreme moments, for instance in the *Phaedo*, this confidence in the power of virtue springs from a complete divorce between the virtuous agent and his physical embodiment - death becomes a liberation from the prison of the physical body and its desires. Admitting that the virtuous man can be seriously affected by changes of events external to virtue itself is, on such a view, an admission that we are somehow tied to the empirical world and weighed down by it; that we are not purely spiritual beings. The view that virtue is self-sufficient was adopted by the Stoics. Cicero writes;

“...anyone who fears pain or death must inevitably be unhappy, because pain is a frequent occurrence and death is never far off...Add exile if you wish to the list of troubles- and bereavement, and childlessness...If there exists, therefore, any man who is capable of regarding the hazards and accidents of fortune and human life as endurable...then there is every reason why he should be happy. And the fact that this can be achieved by what is morally right leads up to the further point that this sort of goodness is enough, *by itself* and without any additional factor, to bring happiness to anyone in the world.”<sup>56</sup>

The aim of this assertion of the self-sufficiency of virtue is, in the end, to make a man's fate - whether he is *eudaimon* or not - a function of his virtue. It is an attempt to deny the role of luck, and of what is beyond our control. Epictetus is quite explicit;

“ “So-and-so's son is dead. What do you think of that?” It lies outside the sphere of choice, it is not an evil.- “So-and-so has been disinherited by his father. What do you think of that?” It lies outside the sphere of choice, it is not an evil.”<sup>57</sup>

We may be reminded here of Kant's attempt to locate moral value exclusively in the good will and his refusal to grant moral significance to what lies beyond our control. As Bernard Williams remarks, this view is an attempt to render the world a place ordered by the principles of justice and fairness<sup>58</sup>. But the price of this assurance is high; the domain

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<sup>56</sup> Cicero, *Tusculum Disputations* 5, 6, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, Bk. 3 Ch. 8.

<sup>58</sup> “It expresses an ideal, presented by Kant, once again, that is the most unqualified and also one of the most moving; the ideal that human existence can be ultimately just. Most advantages and admired characteristics are distributed in



of virtue becomes *internal* to the agent. Virtue is cut off from action and relations with others, for these are *beyond* the control of the agent and therefore subject to luck. This is a picture of the virtuous agent Aristotle rejected. Virtue as an inactive disposition is nothing, or very little. We only call virtuous those who act virtuously; it is no achievement, Aristotle implies, to claim virtue in the Stoic sense. He offers the comparison with an Olympic athlete. We do not regard it as sufficient to be a great runner that one have the *ability* to win races. The great runner is the one who actually races and wins. For Aristotle virtue is necessary for happiness, but it is not sufficient. In addition, the agent requires the goods which are “external” to virtue;

“No activity is complete if it is impeded; but *eudaimonia* is something complete. So the eudaimon person needs the goods of the body and external goods and goods of luck, in addition, so that his activities should not be impeded. Those who claim that the person who is being tortured on the wheel, or the person who has encountered great reversals of fortune, is eudaimon, so long as he is good, are not saying anything- whether that is their intention or not”

(EE 1153b16-21)

For the Stoics, in contrast, virtue *is* sufficient for happiness. The implications of this view of self-sufficiency for the value of emotions are obvious. Since for the Stoics virtue, an internal state, is sufficient for *eudaimonia* and since emotional states are attachments to things in the world -love for friends and family, pride in our achievements, guilt at what we have done or failed to do, fear of death, anger at insults and so on - these worldly things are themselves not genuinely goods at all. Emotion therefore involves an erroneous attribution of value to its objects. Here, the arguments over the *value* of emotion bring us to a claim about their *nature*. If an emotion involves the erroneous attribution of value to something, that must be because an emotion is or involves a *judgement*. There is disagreement among the Greek Stoics over this claim; Chrysippus, at least, seems to want to claim that an emotion just *is* a judgement or belief, while Posidonius for example takes a different view. Before considering that claim however, we should make our mind up

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ways that, if not unjust, are at any rate not just, and some people are simply luckier than others. The ideal of morality is a value, a moral value, that transcends luck.” *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy* (p. 195).

whether the Stoics have shown convincingly that emotional evaluations *are* erroneous. This claim, we have seen, rests upon their view that only virtue is truly valuable. But not only is this claim highly dubious, but the account of virtue itself which they offer is insubstantial. And we might wonder how virtue is *assessed* when it never issues in anything.

The Stoics were aware that their theories would meet with strong resistance and that acceptance of them would require philosophical therapy of the very sort they recommend. They would therefore perhaps not be surprised by the sorts of objections suggested so far. But it would be a mistake to diagnose resistance to their views as mere philosophical conservatism. The Stoics, I think, fail to convince us that the picture they offer *is* ethically desirable, ultimately because the Platonic aspiration, which they pick up, to conceive man as only accidentally *in the world*, is not one we can really accept as a basis for living.



## Stoic Accounts of Emotion.

Let us turn now to the account the Stoics offer of emotional states. By all accounts<sup>59</sup> there was little agreement among the leading Greek Stoics about what, in detail, an emotion is. All are agreed that emotions are cognitive in some sense, but there is disagreement between Chrysippus, Zeno and Posidonius over whether emotions merely involve a cognitive *element* or simply *are* cognitions. They are all however in agreement that emotions are *irrational*. This claim sums up the arguments considered in the previous section, to the effect that emotions involve erroneous attributions of value. However it appears at least to clash with another feature of Stoic psychology, the claim that the psyche is unified by a rational *hegemonikon*. In this respect, the Stoics disagree with Plato. Emotion is not a “giving in” to the irrational part of the soul, since there is no irrational *part*. But if emotion is rational, how can it be irrational also?

The answer to this puzzle is obviously that there are two senses of “rational” at work. Modern philosophers also distinguish two similar senses<sup>60</sup>. In one sense “rational” means roughly, “done for a reason” and indicates that a certain type of explanation- one involving *reasons*- is appropriate. It may also involve at least the possibility of second-order evaluation.<sup>61</sup> But something that is rational in this sense may still be done for bad reasons. *Normatively* speaking then, an action done for bad reasons will be *irrational*, and in this second sense an action can be irrational while nevertheless being done for reasons and so rational in the first sense. For the Stoics, emotions are rational in the first sense but not in the second.

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<sup>59</sup> Recent discussions, upon which I have drawn, include; Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, Ch. 5; Martha Nussbaum, “The Stoics and The Extirpation of the Passions” and “Stoic Tonics” in *The Therapy of Desire*; Justin Gosling, *Weakness of the Will* Ch.5; A. C. Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology” in Rist (ed.) *The Stoics*; I. G. Kidd, “Posidonius on Emotions” in Rist; Christopher Gill, “Did Chrysippus Understand Medea?” *Phronesis* 1983; Richard Sorabji, “Is Stoic Therapy Helpful As Psychotherapy?” and Bernard Williams, “Reply to Sorabji”, both in Sorabji (ed.) *Aristotle and After*.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons and Causes”. See chapter eight for further discussion. Julia Annas also distinguishes two senses (Annas Op. Cit. p.105).

<sup>61</sup> This possibility is discussed in chapter eight.

We have already spent some time considering the Stoics' reasons for thinking emotions irrational in the normative sense. But why did they think they were rational in the other sense? It might not seem surprising that they held this view, since the account of emotions offered in chapter one has already shown how this is true. But Chrysippus at least held a much stronger view. In Stoic psychology the *phantasia* or appearances play a crucial role<sup>62</sup>. An emotion can be broken down into two stages. First there is the presentation or *phantasia*. In the case of fear, say, this will be to the effect that such-and-such is threatening or dangerous. Phantasia correspond quite closely to "seeing-as" experiences. Crucially, they share with them the feature of not being *asserted*. Thus, the appearance or presentation of something's being harmful may be something I deny or reject. And this is the second stage. For the Stoics, that I have the power to assent to or reject the emotional appearance is crucial. In Chrysippus' view, the appearance alone is not an emotion; it is the act of *assenting* to it which constitutes the emotion<sup>63</sup>. The appearance has propositional content<sup>64</sup>. But it is the judgement involved in assenting to the appearance which is important, since I am responsible for this. As A. C. Lloyd has pointed out<sup>65</sup>, this account pictures an emotional reaction as the result of a choice, a decision, in a way that anticipates the theory of Sartre. Marthan Nussbaum<sup>66</sup> sees the Stoic view as picturing judgements as *actions*. However, any account which sees emotions as actions must be mistaken, I think, for the same reason as any account which pictures them as decisions; namely that it ignores the *passive* element of judgement (and belief) which I have emphasised in previous chapters.

But, that objection aside, how is the judgement related to the emotion? Here there is disagreement among commentators<sup>67</sup>, but the weight of opinion seems to be that for

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<sup>62</sup> On *phantasia* in Stoic psychology see Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* sec. 39. And on emotion p. 420. Also, Nussbaum, "The Stoics and The Extirpation of the Passions" p.327, and Gosling (Op. Cit.) p.50-55; see also chapter eight.

<sup>63</sup> See Gosling p.63.

<sup>64</sup> See the discussion of *phantasia* in chapter eight.

<sup>65</sup> Lloyd Op. Cit.

<sup>66</sup> Nussbaum, "Extirpation of the Passions" p.367.

<sup>67</sup> A. C. Lloyd considers and then rejects the reduction of emotion to judgement. He interprets Chrysippus instead as claiming that the judgement *leads* to emotion (p239). Both Martha Nussbaum (Op. Cit. p. 373) and Julia Annas (Op. Cit. p108) reject this account. Nussbaum, in addition to interpreting Chrysippus as claiming that an emotion is a judgement, attempts to defend and support his claim.



Chrysippus the judgement just *is* the emotion. Even among commentators who accept this reading of Chrysippus, there is disagreement as to what it amounts to. Martha Nussbaum anticipates an obvious reaction; it is easy to see how someone might think that a judgement was *sufficient* for emotion, but how could they think it *was* the emotion? Surely that leaves out the affective element, the *feeling*, as well as physiological factors? Nussbaum's defence of the identity claim however in the end amounts simply to the argument that the judgement is sufficient for the emotion (376) and the idea that the affect and the judgement belong to the same part of the soul (380). This, however, is compatible with their being *distinct things* which belong to the same part of the soul. So I think on the basis of Nussbaum's defence, the identity claim remains mysterious.

A rather different view is offered by Justin Gosling. According to him, Chrysippus is not claiming that the affective element somehow *is* the judgement. Instead, he interprets Chrysippus as saying that when we use the term "emotion" correctly, we will use it to refer to the act of judgement, since that is the only element for which the agent is really responsible. The feeling, or affective element, then, is not properly speaking, part of the emotion at all. It is in this sense that an emotion *is* a judgement. On this view, feeling is not *reduced* to judgement, rather it is excluded from the emotion altogether. Gosling however, does not defend this stipulative redefinition of "emotion". Neither interpretation therefore makes Chrysippus' extreme view any more convincing.<sup>68</sup>

Although the account so far presented is similar to the one offered in previous chapters in that it distinguishes between an unasserted appearance and secondly a judgement concerning the appearance, there is an important difference between the view described there and the Stoic view. According to the account offered in chapter one, an emotion is not a belief, although it may involve belief. On Chrysippus' account, the

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<sup>68</sup> Exactly what Chrysippus' view was is made more difficult to decide by the fact that his account is reported second hand, by Galen. Galen, unfortunately, subscribed to the Platonic doctrine of the divided soul, and so, as commentators point out, his presentation of Chrysippus' contrary view is not impartial. Nevertheless, according to Galen, Chrysippus, sometimes talked of emotions as intellectual judgements, but at others included something like the affective elements; "In these definitions he obviously mentions only the rational part of the soul, omitting the appetitive...but in his next definitions he writes some things consistent with...Zeno...Shrinkings and swellings, of course and expansions and contractions...are affections of the irrational faculty that result from opinions." Quoted in Long and Sedley ( p.411.) Chrysippus must include *some* affective element - "expansions and contractions"- either as a consequence of the emotion proper or as a part of it since he claims that another key feature of emotions is that they are "excessive" and out of control. But obviously the judgement, as far as he is concerned is *under* our control, so there *must* be something else.

emotion is the judgement, which *is* asserted, and therefore a belief.<sup>69</sup> A second difference between the account in chapter one and the Stoic account is over the possibility of conflict between the judgement and the *phantasia*. In chapter one I offered examples of cases in which someone rejects the judgement connected with the emotional appearance - or, refuses to *assent* to it - but still has the emotion. The person who laughs at the racist joke, even though he does not assent to it still finds it funny somehow. Recalcitrant emotions too, exhibit the same pattern of divergence between belief, or judgement, and appearance. We might call emotions of this sort *akratic*, since judgement in these cases is ineffective, as it is in cases of akratic actions.

The Stoics, however, do not allow for this possibility. Emotions embody judgements that are mistaken, or irrational, as we have already seen. But those who assent to these appearances do not *think* them to be false. Epictetus writes,

“When, therefore, someone assents to something false, know that he did not want to assent to something false. For every soul is deprived of truth against its will...it seemed to him that what is in fact false was true.”<sup>70</sup>

So, someone cannot willingly assent to what they know to be false. However, this could only be (as for example is the case with belief) if the assent is not really a *decision* at all, but is a passive recognition of the cases in which assent is demanded. But more important than this is another point, that since *by definition* the emotion is the assent or rejection of the appearance, if I reject the appearance in judgement, then I do not *have* the emotion. The Stoics therefore rule out - by apparent sleight of hand- the kinds of cases which might be presented as counter-examples to their theory. Recalcitrant or akratic emotions, which appear at first glance to be cases of emotions *without* assent to the relevant judgements, turn out, after all, not to be emotions at all but something like pre-emotions (*propatheiai*). Seneca writes;

“They are not affections , but the preliminaries, the prelude to affections...None of these fortuitous mental impulses deserves to be called an emotion. They are things suffered, so

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<sup>69</sup> Nussbaum (p.374) suggests that what is assented to is a *proposition*. This presumably is the propositional *content* of the *phantasia*.

<sup>70</sup> *The Discourses* (Bk.1. 27.)



to speak, not something done by the mind. Emotion is not a matter of being moved by impressions received, but of surrendering oneself to them and following up the chance movement.”<sup>71</sup>

Here again the Stoics anticipate a modern reaction, this time amongst philosophers sympathetic to “cognitivist” accounts of the emotions which concentrate on *beliefs* when faced with apparent counter-examples; simply define “emotion” so as to make the counter-examples irrelevant.<sup>72</sup> But what grounds do the Stoics offer for accepting the restriction of the term emotion to the assenting element? We can accept that assent or judgement commits me to the emotional response in a way that I am not committed to, say, recalcitrant emotions. But that does not force acceptance of the Stoic view. Nor need the claim that we are responsible for the judgements we make. In fact the Stoic picture is implausible, in part for reasons already mentioned. But furthermore, it is implausible because it denies the reality of conflict. Akratic emotions testify to the reality of mental *conflict*. The later Platonic account of akrasia, which we find suggested in the *Republic*, takes it to be the result of distinct parts of the soul. The Stoics, however, claim the soul is unified by reason, as we have seen. Furthermore, on their account akratic emotions are simply things that happen to someone, but which are beyond his *control* since he, let us say, properly withheld his assenting judgement. It cannot be his fault, then, if he nevertheless has an “emotional” response. There is consequently no conflict here, because the emotion is not in any substantial sense “his”; only what is under his control counts as that. The account of emotions we are offered by the Stoics then, complements the account of virtuous agency in that both focus on the essential idea of control.

Chrysippus, in fact, was interested in cases of apparent conflict, the most famous of which is Euripides’ *Medea*<sup>73</sup>. The case of *Medea* is not easily amenable to the standard explanation of akrasia; she does not appear to be *overcome* by passion or desire, for example. Instead she seems aware of her course of action and aware equally that what she

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<sup>71</sup> Seneca, *De Ira* 2.2-3.

<sup>72</sup> This point about the Stoic argument is made, with approval, by Julia Annas (*Op. Cit.* p.116). Kendall Walton (“Fearing Fictions” *Journal of Philosophy* 1975) is an obvious modern case. For Walton, emotional reactions to fictions are not *real* emotions since they lack beliefs; rather, they are *quasi*-emotions. See chapter seven for further discussion.

<sup>73</sup> For a discussion of Chrysippus’ treatment of *Medea*, see Christopher Gill (*Op. Cit.*)

is doing conflicts with other values she holds. There is conflict here, but it is not between rival parts of the soul. As Justin Gosling comments,

“All this will give an air of struggle...and one set of consideration can reasonably be called those of reason. But it is Medea who is struggling, not her reason/real self against irrational passion. None of this requires a split in her *hegemonikon*, and nothing in the Stoic position precludes this picture.” (p. 59)

However, while the Stoic account of Medea's behaviour may be credible, it does not follow that the same pattern of explanation will be equally successful elsewhere. It may be that Medea is *not* an example of *akrasia* at all. Real cases of *akrasia* may be more problematic. There is more to be said about the issue of conflict, and a more thorough consideration of *akrasia* is impossible here. However, the Stoic treatment of it, together with their theory of emotions raises some important general points which are relevant to the material in later chapters. So I will return to this issue below. Before doing that, however, there is one final aspect of the Stoic theory which I have so far only touched on; their strategy for reforming the emotions through therapy.

Aristotle was optimistic about the education of the emotions. He seemed to think that essential educational work must be done in the formative years, without which virtue is impossible. But this grounding makes further education possible later on. The Stoics believed that the kind of *temperance* of the emotions Aristotle favoured was not possible. Instead, they argued that complete extirpation of the passions was required. In any case, given their view of the irrational nature of emotion, this is what they would hope for. Why though, did they think Aristotle's kind of education impossible? In a famous image Chrysippus compares someone in an emotional state to someone running;

“When someone walks in accordance with his impulse, the movement of his legs is not excessive but commensurate with the impulse, so that he can stop or change whenever he wants to. But when people run in accordance with their impulse, this sort of thing no longer happens. The movement of their legs exceeds their impulse, so that they are carried away and no longer able to change obediently, as soon as they have started to do so. Something similar I think takes place with impulses, owing to their going beyond the



rational proportion. The result is that when someone has the impulse he is not really obedient to reason.”<sup>74</sup>

So the picture Chrysippus paints is of someone who is not in control; although the assenting judgement is in the agent's control, the ensuing “swellings” and “contractions” become excessive and he cannot control them. Chrysippus therefore rejects the idea that moderation in the Aristotelian sense is an option. Only complete extirpation will work. But are we to take Chrysippus' argument quite generally? As an empirical account of most emotional states it is false; only in extreme cases are people “out of control”. Furthermore, since the Stoics think that extirpation is to be *achieved* by education, do they not thereby concede that emotions *can* be educated? Only in the sense that, since an emotion is a judgement, people can be educated to withhold their judgements. It is therefore judgement, strictly speaking, that is educated. Epictetus says,

“If you set these thoughts against your impression, you will overpower it...in the first place do not allow yourself to be carried away by its intensity; but say, “Impression, wait for me a little. Let me see what you are, and what you represent. Let me test you”...next...you should introduce some fair and noble impression to replace it, and banish this base and sordid one.”<sup>75</sup>

Here Epictetus in fact indicates *two* ways in which education of the emotions can be approached; first, by gaining more control over our judgements/ assents to appearances. But in addition to this he suggests that we should aim to tackle the *phantasia* themselves; they too can be educated. In common sense terms, this is what we would expect. Merely removing the judgement will not be sufficient to prevent the emotion, although we have seen that the Stoics officially deny this. Epictetus is in any case not typical of the Stoics here, and the weight of their therapeutic practice falls on judgement.<sup>76</sup> Exactly *how* we can educate *phantasia* is a much more difficult question than how we can educate

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<sup>74</sup> From Galen, “On Hippocrates and Plato's Doctrines” quoted in Long and Sedley 1987 (p.414)

<sup>75</sup> Epictetus, *The Discourses*, Bk. 2. 18. 24.

<sup>76</sup> Principally in the form of reminding ourselves of truths such as that our loved ones are mortal, and other propositions of this sort. Nussbaum (Op. Cit.) also highlights the role of literary texts and the *persona* of the philosopher in therapeutic sessions. She emphasises that it was not conceived as a dry bookish exercise.

judgement. A starting point might be the suggestion that imagination plays a greater role than in the education of judgement. I return to this issue in chapter six, so I shall not pursue it at present.

However, one important point *can* be made. If we are to take the Stoic view seriously, then we must accept the idea that becoming convinced of a range of philosophical precepts and arguments will be sufficient to liberate us from the yoke of false emotional habits. But this can have little to do with the real work of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. Once more, Stoic definitions make their claims seem more substantial than they are. Concerning the range of “emotional” disorders (everyday usage), Stoic therapy will surely achieve little; not simply because it appears to ignore the role of the unconscious and insist that the problem consists merely in bringing judgement under control, but also because, as Bernard Williams points out, much of what real therapy can achieve is the result of factors other than the *content* of the therapy;

“But seriously dangerous or troubling states need interpretation, and it is not purely a cognitive point that the sufferer needs someone else’s help in that interpretation. The psychoanalytic concept of transference is only the most dramatic and far-going representation of something that is in general true, that it is not just the content of a helper’s help that does the work, but one’s relation to the helper.”<sup>77</sup>

If we accept this, it will seem a kind of naivety perhaps in Stoic thought that it was hoped that philosophical argument itself could effect profound psychological changes. Martha Nussbaum has argued, however, that this account leaves out the Stoic’s emphasis on literary style and the rhetorical elements of therapy<sup>78</sup>. However this important concession seems to lead us *away* from an emphasis on the reform of active judgement and towards a picture in which somehow emotional education and therapy are affected not through direct assault by philosophical argument but by more oblique techniques that “steal little by little into the mind”<sup>79</sup>. The focus of the Stoic view is on active control and self-

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<sup>77</sup> Williams (Op. Cit. p.212)

<sup>78</sup> Nussbaum, “Stoic Tonics” (p.330). Cf. also Arrian’s introduction to Epictetus’ *Discourses*, where he apologises that in setting down only Epictetus’ *words* he omits the vital element of the presence and voice of the man himself. Arguments in favour of the effectiveness of poetry are given in Seneca, letters 38 and 108.

<sup>79</sup> Seneca, letter 38.



sufficiency. And a consequence of this is that learning should proceed by addressing active judgement. One of many Platonic assumptions which the Stoics seem to have adopted is a belief in the supreme importance of philosophical argument as the source of understanding. For reasons of this sort, amongst others, Plato could not take seriously the idea that the arts, which did not proceed by dialectic towards real knowledge (*episteme*), could be a source of understanding<sup>80</sup>.

The connection I would like to draw at present is between the dominant role of argument as it features in Plato and the Stoics and the implications of this insistence for those philosophers' picture of human psychology. One convenient way into this topic, fortunately, is through the emotions. Since these issues will feature prominently in chapter eight, I will end the present section by indicating some general connections.

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<sup>80</sup> See chapter eight for further discussion.

## Conclusion; Conflict and Conviction.

Since the general issue to be raised in this section concerns the economy of psychological explanation, a good place to start is with the question of akrasia. In the *Protagoras* we find Plato's earlier treatment of this problem. There his solution is, in effect, to deny the existence of the problem. What we might be tempted to describe as cases in which people are "overcome" by desire or emotion, contrary to their judgements, cannot really be so, Plato claims. If they really are instances of the agent being "overcome", then it becomes questionable that they really are intentional actions at all. But the whole problem of akrasia is how someone could *intentionally* perform what they judge to be an undesirable action. To entitle these actions to the description, "intentional", conversely, makes it implausible that the agent really *is* overcome. Instead, according to Plato, we should see that the action is undertaken for deliberate ends, but that my estimation of what I judge to *be* the best option is qualified by the circumstances in which I find myself.<sup>81</sup>

One principle which is in operation here is the idea that action must be explicable in terms of beliefs and desires which the agent has.<sup>82</sup> In relation to cases of apparent akrasia this results in the assumption that there must be some *change of mind* on the agent's part, which explains his action. If the agent really does do what he thinks to be the worse option, then what kind of account of action could explain it? In the *Protagoras*, at least, Plato seems to prefer the *economy* of his type of explanation to rival accounts. But if we are to reject his account we will need to be able to offer an alternative explanation which makes sense of the apparent *division* within the agent that will result if we reject the assumption (above) about psychological explanation.

As a way to see how this might be possible, consider the following example of Justin Gosling's;

"...suppose I want to get safely over a deep ravine. Across it there is a rope bridge that swings alarmingly. I do stringent tests on the strength of the ropes and conclude that the

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<sup>81</sup> Justin Gosling writes, "...I still do what at the time I think best. It may be that others think my initial objective better. I may, myself, in my more reflective moments, wish that I could keep steadily to that objective...It remains only that *at the time* I do what I think it best to do." Gosling (Op. Cit. p.18)

<sup>82</sup> Further critical discussion of this principle is contained in chapter eight.



bridge could safely carry three elephants...On approaching it, however, I cannot, as I might say, bring myself to believe in its safety...there is no division of motivation here...there is, however, division of judgement. By one route to a sort of judgement, I am convinced it is safe; by another I am not. The admission that measuring skill removes the power of appearances seems to suggest that conviction follows immediately on calculation.”<sup>83</sup>

This example raises a couple of points. First, as Gosling notes, the conflict is between what we might call “judgement”, rather than between judgement and desire. Secondly, in Stoic terms, it is clear which “judgement” we actively *assent* to; the judgement that the bridge is safe. What then of the rival judgement? What should we say of the gap between my rejection of it and the fact that it is effective, nevertheless? It is in connection with this question that Gosling’s mention of the notion of *conviction* is relevant.<sup>84</sup> On one view of the case, we might simply conclude that “I can’t help” but be afraid of the bridge. But Gosling’s talk of “*routes* to judgement” suggests an alternative; that the appearance (*phantasia*) of the bridge being unsafe is one that *convinces* me even though I do not assent to it. This account of the case means that a convincing *phantasia* does result in something like a judgement, but not one that is asserted or believed. What such “conviction” might amount to is an issue that will be discussed at greater length in chapter eight, but at present we should note that such an account allows, first of all, for an alternative account of akrasia; that it *is* based on a kind of judgement, but it is not an asserted or assented-to judgement. Secondly, the implications for emotions are also clear. Recalcitrant or akratic emotions need not involve assented-to judgements. Nevertheless, the phobic’s experience of the frightful *phantasia* is *convincing*, although he believes differently.<sup>85</sup>

For my purposes I would like to suggest two conclusions we might draw from this point. The first is a general one about psychological explanation. If we insist on simplicity and

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<sup>83</sup> Gosling (Op. Cit. p.15).

<sup>84</sup> The nature and role of conviction is discussed in chapter eight.

<sup>85</sup> Galen seems to gesture towards an objection to Chrysippus in these terms; “ When he says that the persuasiveness of impressions, and conversation are responsible for ...maladjustments...we should ask why pleasure projects the persuasive appearance that it is good...Similarly, why are we readily persuaded, when we hear victory at Olympia...praised as good things ...”. In Long and Sedley, p.415. Julia Annas, (Op. Cit. p.116) also mentions that Chrysippus admits that *phantasia* are convincing.



economy in our explanations we are likely, if the points just made are correct, to end up over-simplifying things. One way we might do this is by insisting that the only form of judgement is *belief*. This is Plato's assumption in the Protagoras; however the tendency to simplification in this way seems to be a persistent temptation in philosophy. It also lies behind the accounts of modern writers such as Donald Davidson, who also emphasise the "belief/desire" psychology.<sup>86</sup> The emphasis on belief also neatly tends to eliminate real conflict, where we should not *want* to eliminate it. The second point is that our emotional states are a good example of this. Akritic emotions and phobias involve more than the streamlined, belief-orientated psychology allows. For example, Kendall Walton's famous example<sup>87</sup> of the man in the cinema, "terrified" of the slime although he does not *believe* that he is in danger. But to leave things at that is to fail to do justice to his experience; he is somehow *convinced*, in direct *conflict* with his beliefs, that the slime is threatening. One final suggestion follows from this. If it is *conviction* that is at stake in these cases as much as *belief*, then it will not be as easy as Plato assumed to claim that only dialectic is important. As far as education of the emotions is concerned, the goal may be that we find *phantasia* of one sort rather than another convincing, rather than arrive at the correct set of *beliefs*. However, to achieve this end, we may have to draw on techniques beyond those which philosophy can offer. This concludes the present discussion of Stoicism. In terms of the two questions with which I began chapter one- regarding the nature and the value of emotions- the answers Stoicism offers are unsatisfactory. And more than this, we have considered some reasons for thinking that its background assumptions about psychology are also unacceptable.

One point linking both the Stoic and the Existentialist challenge to the Aristotelian picture is the emphasis on choice and decision. A theme running throughout this chapter has been that this emphasis is a mistake. Character and the ideas of practical necessity and moral incapacity, for example, reveal the importance of passive judgement for our ethical thought. This is true most importantly, for present purposes, of emotional responses. Aristotle's account of the value of emotions remains, then, unscathed by these attacks. But Stoicism seems a strange doctrine by modern lights for another reason. Against the contingencies of the world it counsels what Isaiah Berlin refers to as "Retreat into the

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<sup>86</sup> These points about Davidson are developed in chapter eight.

<sup>87</sup> Walton, "Fearing Fictions". The example is discussed further in chapter eight.



Inner Citadel”<sup>88</sup>. It advises that we limit our experience to that which is truly valuable, and insists that this does not include emotional experience. By sharp contrast, in the modern Romantic movement, we find the antithesis of this view; a thirst for experience generally and a longing for emotional experience in particular. However, there is also a deeper disagreement between the attitudes of antiquity - whether Stoic or Aristotelian- towards the emotions and those of the Romantics, and it is with this difference that the next chapter is concerned.

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<sup>88</sup> Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” p.135.

## Chapter Five ; Passion and Emotion.

In the previous chapter we considered one account of the value of emotions - the Aristotelian one - which focuses on the relationship between emotion and character. The present chapter attempts to evaluate a more modern perspective on the value of emotion; Romanticism. The differences between these two views of emotion are nowhere clearer, perhaps, than in the accounts they offer of love. As a means of bringing out these differences, therefore, I begin by outlining Aristotle's account of *philia*. Here too, it emerges, Aristotle takes *character* to be all-important. The Romantic conception of love, by contrast, highlights, not the relationship between love and character, but between love and *self*. A further difference, I argue, is that romantic love is more appropriately thought of as an *aesthetic*, rather than an ethical phenomenon. That Aristotle's account of *philia* takes no notice of this fact can be partly explained, perhaps, by the fact that the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic is relatively modern, and not one available to either Aristotle or Plato. But this can only be part of the explanation, since the account of love offered by Plato *does* emphasise that it is a response to beauty. The conclusion which we should reach on the basis of these considerations, is, I contend, that it is a mistake to think of the *value* of all emotion as deriving from its connection with character, as Aristotle's account suggests.



## Aristotle.

In reading Aristotle's account of *philia* the first difficulty we face is in saying what exactly it is an account of. Aristotle includes as examples of *philia*; family relationships, friendship, "civic friendship" and some sorts of business relationships. Not all of these would count as instances of "love", even taken in the widest sense. On the other hand, the relation between mother and child is given as a paradigm of *philia*, so it would seem that if "love" is not wide enough a translation, "friendship" is also unsatisfactory. I shall use both "love" and "friendship", depending on context. Despite these difficulties in the translation of *philia*, we can focus on something that Aristotle seems to regard as central to all instances of it; an interest in promoting the well-being of the other person .

Aristotle distinguishes three different bases for friendship<sup>1</sup>. The first is friendship based on advantage, or utility; the second is friendship based on pleasure taken in the friend, and the last is friendship based on a mutual appreciation of virtuous character. It is the third of these which Aristotle regards as true friendship. In what, then, does the alleged superiority of this form of friendship lie? Does it, for instance, lie in the fact that it does *not* involve pleasure and utility? Aristotle however does not say that only pleasure-friendship (type two) involves pleasure, or that only utility - friendship (type one) involves utility. He recognises that friendship based on virtuous character (type three) *can* also be both pleasant and useful. What then *are* the grounds of its superiority?

One difference between character-friendship and the other two forms is that they will tend to have a shorter life span, ceasing to exist when the friend ceases to be either pleasant or useful. Character-friendship, by contrast, will, according to Aristotle, tend to endure, in spite of ( many kinds of) change. The reason is that it is focused on *character-* and virtuous character (it is

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<sup>1</sup> N. E. 1156a6-27.

claimed) tends to endure more than incidental and more superficial attributes of a person's personality. But although virtuous character is the *object* of friendship, Aristotle believes that it is important to distinguish this from love of an *object*. A wine-lover, for example, may technically count as a lover, but his love lacks any mutuality<sup>2</sup>. Not only is his attitude not reciprocated, but the absence of reciprocity is considered *unimportant* by him. This kind of love seems, in Aristotle's view, to be based *just* on pleasant sensation, whereas character-friendship is not;

“Now it looks as if love were a feeling, friendship a state of character; for love may be felt just as much towards lifeless things, but mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character; and men wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a result of character.” (N.E.1157b24-29)

Aristotle here suggests that pleasure-friendship and utility-friendship are more like, though not identical to, the love of objects, because they too are one-way. Of course it would be incorrect to claim that pleasure and utility friendship can *only* be one-way; they too, can be mutual. The difference, Aristotle suggests, lies in the fact that character friendship involves choice, whereas the other types do not. What Aristotle seems to have in mind is that in character-friendship the friends choose to promote each other's well-being, and do so not on the basis of the pleasant feeling each causes in the other, but *for their own sake*. However, if I do take *pleasure*, in the company of a friend, why should this preclude my also wishing to promote his well-being? The assumption being made appears to be that because the basis of the friendship is my own pleasure, which is self-interested, I do not have the required interest in the friend *for his own sake*. But this move from pleasure to a lack of concern is erroneous. The fact that the original motivation for my interest in someone is pleasure, does not *rule out* my coming to care about his well-

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<sup>2</sup> It is not obvious however, that mutuality is a necessary condition of love, and if this claim is to amount to more than a stipulative definition, some further grounds for accepting it must be offered.



being for its own sake. There is no inconsistency in taking pleasure in someone's company and caring about them for their own sake. In general, taking pleasure in something may be *self-interested*, but it need not be *selfish*.<sup>3</sup>

Another of Aristotle's points, which we have already alluded to, may provide a better basis for his claims for the superiority of character friendship. This is the claim that pleasure and utility friendship are based on properties of the person which are *accidental*. Character-friendship, by contrast, is based on properties of the person which are essential to him. This seems to conform to one of our intuitions about love; that it should be of the *person* and not merely of some *property* they happen to possess<sup>4</sup>. The question then must be, what is it that we have to love about a person to be loving *them*? Aristotle's answer to this question, as we have already seen, is that I must love the person's goodness- their virtuous *character*. Aristotle's view that virtuous character constitutes someone's essence is a feature of his metaphysical biology, according to which substances possess essences and tend towards a *telos* or purpose. Since it is of man's essence to reach *eudaimonia*, a virtuous character is a human being's *essence* in a way that other properties he may happen to possess are not. The alleged superiority of character friendship, then, requires the background assumptions of Aristotle's metaphysics for a full defence.

It is also a noteworthy fact that *philia* is non-sexual. Aristotle's reason for excluding erotic love is that he claims it is merely a subclass of pleasure-friendship and is therefore self-interested. But we have already seen that this claim is mistaken. Nevertheless, Aristotle's hostility to any account which makes pleasure and feeling crucial elements of the value of relationships has had enormous influence on subsequent thought. To this we can also add a

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<sup>3</sup> The point made here is tentatively ascribed to Aristotle himself by John Cooper, in "Aristotle on Friendship" (p.305) in Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle*. Cooper interprets Aristotle as recognising both that pleasure-friendship can embody altruism and that character-friendship involves pleasure.

<sup>4</sup> The point is also emphasised by Pascal in the *Pensées*. Unlike Aristotle, however, Pascal suggests that since all we ever *do* love are qualities of a person, it is a fact that we never love the person himself. Pascal's argument is discussed and criticised by Roger Scruton in ch.4 of *Sexual Desire*.



related, historical point. Aristotle's account of *philia* ( and also, before it, Plato's account of *eros* in the *Symposium*) pictures friendship/love as a response to something deemed to be of intrinsic value, and not undertaken in the hope of reward or benefit. This thought is picked up later by the Christian tradition in the form of the concept of *agape*; the love God has for all his subjects, and the love we are to have for- amongst others- both our neighbours and our enemies. *Agape* is selfless and looks for no beneficial return. Furthermore, it is a response to a person *in spite of*, rather than *because of*, any particular identifying features they possess<sup>5</sup>. In this sense it is *unconditional*. Erotic or romantic love, by contrast, is associated in both classical and Christian traditions with self-interest, and is therefore deemed to be of no value. This hostility is still prevalent in some modern writers<sup>6</sup>. The resulting picture of love and friendship - in keeping with the general account given in the last chapter- is that love and friendship are first and foremost *ethical* phenomena. Loving is a question of being a person who has character<sup>7</sup> and such a person will naturally be attracted to those who are similarly virtuous. Virtue, then, stands firmly at the centre of Aristotle's account.

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<sup>5</sup> In this respect it differs most obviously from Erotic or Romantic love. However it also differs from *philia*, which is focused on specific features of character.

<sup>6</sup> An instance of this attitude is Erich Fromm's well known book *The Art of Loving*. In it Fromm argues that love is mistakenly understood as a *feeling*- one of heightened intensity- rather than as a *capacity*. Fromm argues that loving requires certain traits of character - traits which turn out to be very like virtues. Love is pictured as an activity (an art), not a *passive* emotional response. Romantic love is construed by Fromm as merely analogous to a commodity exchange (p.10/11). The implication hovers in the background that it is therefore self-interested and unwholesome. Here again, in true Aristotelian fashion, love is a question of *character*. On the historical lineage of these ideas, see Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, and Robert Solomon, "The Virtues of Love" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol.13. The assumed self-interest of romantic love is also a prominent feature of the writing of cynics such as La Rochefoucauld; "We cannot love anything except in terms of ourselves" (Maxim 81) and; "The reason why lovers never tire of each other's company is that the conversation is always about themselves" (Maxim 312). However, not only should we question the mistaken assumption behind such views, but we should entertain the possibility that love for another individual - even in its *romantic* form- involves one of the steps which is fundamental to ethics- the ability to find intrinsic value in something/someone beyond oneself. As Bernard Williams notes ("Egoism and Altruism") the first step in moral thinking is not the one from myself to *everyone else* (as Kant would have it) but from oneself to *another*.

<sup>7</sup> This is Fromm's view.



What should we make of Aristotle's account of friendship? First of all, it is certainly false to think that a relationship based in pleasure must be either selfish or exclusively self-interested. So the subsequent use of this objection in opposition to Romantic and erotic love is simply mistaken. Secondly, is it really credible that love between parents and children, for example, can be analysed along the lines Aristotle suggests? It is not; there is no question that parents love their children for their virtuous character, since they have not yet *developed* one. Yet such love is not only *not* self-interested, it is, as Aristotle suggests, a paradigm of what is good in cases of love. So we might have legitimate doubts that an analysis in terms of respect for good character captures what is valuable about love. A third, and related, worry arises over Aristotle's determination not to think of love as a *passion*. Love between friends, family members and lovers, though distinct in nature, are all still *emotions* with strong affective elements. But Aristotle's account of *philia* seems to downplay this fact and concentrate on notions such as *respect for* and *valuing of*, good character. We might even wonder whether he is offering an account of an emotional response at all. His reluctance stems from the determination noted earlier not to think of *feelings* and pleasure as grounding the value of love.

We can pursue these points further if we consider a familiar distinction; between *loving* and *being-in-love*. The latter typically has a shorter duration than the former, while the former usually develops out of the latter as emotional attachments alter in nature. Loving, we might say, is a *settled* disposition and involves an active element<sup>8</sup> which being in love need not. Being *in-love*, in contrast with loving, is characterised by the *intensity* of the emotion. Both, however, may involve concern for the interests of the loved

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<sup>8</sup> Such as that suggested by Fromm; promoting the interests of the loved one, tolerance, understanding, forgiveness, etc. This point is also made by David Hamlyn ("Learning to Love" in *Perception, Learning and the Self*), whose account is otherwise very different from Fromm's.

one, and neither need be self interested<sup>9</sup>. Aristotle's account, to the extent that it fits either of these phenomena, fits loving rather than being in love. Even here, however, the lack of emphasis on the emotional component is a source of worry. In contrast to Aristotle's account, the claim I wish to make is that *being-in-love* is characteristically an *aesthetic* experience, while loving - for reasons already suggested- is more readily seen as falling within the ethical realm.<sup>10</sup>

If this is correct, it may make the Romantic attitude towards emotion more intelligible. The ancient Greeks did not- arguably - possess the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic, largely because the concept of the "aesthetic" itself is relatively modern<sup>11</sup>. It is natural for Aristotle, therefore, to think of the value of love as residing in its connections with good character and virtue, since, as we have seen, this is the analysis he offers for the value of other emotions. In line with his treatment of other emotions, he emphasises when it is *appropriate* and what it is an appropriate response *to*, rather than what it *feels* like or how *pleasant* it is. However, the value of being- in- love simply *does* seem to be tied to the way the experience *feels*. And in addition, we do not possess the confidence that Aristotle may have had, that we *know* in what circumstances love *is* appropriate. As far as romantic love is concerned, we are prepared to allow that the question of appropriateness does

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<sup>9</sup> Being in love *need* not involve any desire to promote the interests of the loved one, however. It seems possible, for example, to be *in love* with someone you dislike or do not value. It is perhaps more difficult- conceptually- to see how it is possible to *love* someone under these conditions.

<sup>10</sup> How this distinction - between the aesthetic and the ethical- should be made, and even whether it can be made at all, is debatable. For the moment I base my suggested identification of *being in love* as an aesthetic phenomenon on three features. First, being in love is characterised by the intensity of *pleasure* involved. Second, it is compatible with a lack of concern for the interests of the loved one. Thirdly, the concept of *beauty* plays a crucial role, as it does, obviously, in aesthetic experience.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, most famously does not distinguish moral and aesthetic in the Form of the Good. The Greek *to kalon* meaning what is "fine", can apply to character but lacks the overtones of our "moral", and also includes the idea of what is beautiful. For discussion of the rival views of Collingwood (1938) and Mothersill (1984) see Janaway, *Images of Excellence*, ch.3. For the History of the concept of the "Aesthetic" see P. O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts", *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1951.



not arise<sup>12</sup>. Although Aristotle's account downplays the importance of feeling, it does not ignore it altogether. As we saw in the previous chapter, on his account, being pained by and taking pleasure in what is *appropriate* is of crucial importance. As already argued, such pain and pleasure are the *criteria* of having a correct grasp of what they are a response to. But this is grounded in a sense that such pain and pleasure *are* appropriate; in the absence of such a sense, in Aristotle's view, the feelings float free, no longer of any intrinsic value themselves<sup>13</sup>. The *value* of feeling must be grounded in something else.

And what is true of being-in-love, is to a lesser extent also true of loving. If we lack an account of what makes the former appropriate, then we lack it for the latter also. Loving may be less *exhaustively* characterised by how it feels, and in particular the *intensity* of the feelings<sup>14</sup>, but feeling is still obviously crucial. Although loving may *incorporate* elements that make it more recognisably an ethical phenomenon, it cannot be exhaustively characterised in those terms. We must conclude then, that Aristotle's account of *philia* offers at best a partial account of *some* of the kinds of human attachment we class as love.

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<sup>12</sup> We often hear remarks such as, "what does she see in him"? Here, the response is felt to be *unintelligible*. But we accept this kind of idiosyncrasy without criticism, whereas we do not in the case of other emotions. This empirical fact suggests that we do not apply normative standards of appropriateness in the case of love.

<sup>13</sup> Writing of the distinction between the aesthetic and the moral, Philippa Foot remarks, "The good of good art...lies in such things as the pleasures of the imagination, and in general in the interest and enjoyment that a man gets from a work of art...We would recognise it as nonsense to say "The fact that a work of art is a good work of art is itself a reason for choosing it, and never mind whether you will get anything out of it or not"." "Morality and Art" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 1970. This attitude towards the aesthetic contrasts most sharply of course with the Kantian conception of morality. There is less of a difference between it and the Aristotelian view of ethics, precisely because Aristotle gives the *pleasure* of the virtuous man a role which is at least in some respects parallel to the one it has in aesthetic experience.

<sup>14</sup> A conclusion of this sort is defended by Solomon (Op. Cit.); "Love briefly summarised, is a dialectical process of mutually received selfhood with a long and varied history. As such, it is much more than a feeling..." (p.28).

## PLATO.

To some extent, we find a philosophical account of love that fills some of the gaps of the Aristotelian approach if we turn to Plato. Plato's account of love is to be found in the two dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Although dictionary definitions of the term "Platonic love" confirm popular usage by describing it as, "purely spiritual love for one of the opposite sex"<sup>15</sup> or, "love free from physical desire"<sup>16</sup>, it is not clear that these *are* elements of the Platonic picture. If "Platonic love" is taken to suggest a purely "intellectual" attitude, or one which is unconcerned with physical beauty, then the popular conception is importantly mistaken. The *Phaedrus* in particular takes a positive view of the passionate element of love<sup>17</sup>, and in addition insists that it is the *whole* soul that is involved in, and captivated by, what is loved, and not merely the intellectual element.

The impression that Plato thinks of love as a form of engagement with *ideas* is not, however, misplaced. The account given by Diotima in the *Symposium* of the lover's ascent to knowledge, might be taken to suggest a purely intellectualist view of love. But this would be to ignore the fact that not only each stage of the ascent but its end-point also is an *emotional* response to beauty;

"What may we suppose to be the felicity of the man who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed...?" (Symp.212c)

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<sup>15</sup> *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. Quoted in Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love". This definition is wrong both with respect to the intellectual content of the love and to the gender of its typical object.

<sup>16</sup> *Collins Concise Dictionary*.

<sup>17</sup> In Socrates' second speech, ( from 244). It is an essential element of the account of *eros* that it is not simply sexual desire (lust), but is a response to *beauty*. This is what makes it necessary to consider it as an account of love. David Halperin is therefore wrong when he writes, "[Plato is] not discussing love at all, but rather eros, or passionate sexual desire- a single aspect of what we normally consider love." (Halperin. 1985)



According to Diotima's account, the lover starts from love of a particular individual. From this point he first notices similarities shared by those he finds as physically beautiful;

“It is great folly not to admit that the beauty exhibited in all bodies is one and the same.” (Symp. 210)

The next stage is to notice that beauty of soul is more valuable than beauty of body (211a). As a result, beauty of soul can more than compensate for an absence of physical beauty. The next stage is to pass from a contemplation of what is shared in common by particular individuals, to a contemplation of absolute beauty in itself;

“This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim, from one instance of physical beauty to two, and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty, and from moral beauty to the beauty of knowledge, until from knowledge of various kinds one arrives at the supreme knowledge whose sole object is that absolute beauty, and knows at last what absolute beauty is.” (211a-212c).

The process of ascent, then, is from the particular to the general and from the general to the abstract. The culmination is the Form of Beauty, which encompasses moral *and* physical beauty. Yet though these two are distinct, the Form is constituted by what they share in common.<sup>18</sup>

Difficulties arise with this account, however, and we can group them under two headings. First, objections to the claim that love is not (really) of

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<sup>18</sup> With respect to the question of whether Plato's Forms involve self-predication, the Form of beauty seems to be an instance where the answer must be that it does, since the lover who has made the ascent and contemplates the Form of Beauty is moved by *its* beauty.

particulars, but of a universal; and second, worries about the claim that beauty and goodness are in some way the same. The difficulty with Plato's claim that love is not of particulars is simply that it is very difficult to accept. One thing that gives us this sense is the thought that our loved-ones cannot easily be *replaced*. There are certainly difficulties in making explicit what this claim of "uniqueness" amounts to<sup>19</sup>; are we to take the claim as maintaining that each of us is *literally* unique, or just that *practically* speaking, we are *as good as* unique? On the account of love offered in the *Symposium*, grief for a deceased loved one will no longer make any sense; since love is ultimately of the Form, which is instantiated by many individuals, what the lover realises at the end of his ascent is that the object of his love was not - contrary to what he initially supposed - that *particular* individual, but something larger which transcends *any* given particular, and of which they are merely imperfect reflections;

"What may we suppose to be the felicity of the man who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed, who instead of a beauty tainted by human flesh and colour and a mass of perishable rubbish, is able to apprehend divine beauty where it exists apart and alone?...Do you not see that in that region alone where he sees beauty with the faculty capable of seeing it, will he be able to bring forth not mere reflected images of goodness but true goodness, because he will be in contact not with a reflection but with the truth."  
(Symp.212c).

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<sup>19</sup> A similar problem arises with Aristotle's account, since it would seem that I could love anyone with good character with equal appropriateness, and therefore there is little room for the particular individual. Nancy Sherman defends Aristotle against this objection in *Making a Necessity of Virtue* ch.5. There she argues that for Aristotle shared history can serve to make a given individual non-substitutable. The difficulties with the Platonic version of this problem are discussed in Vlastos, "The Individual as and Object of Love" in *Platonic Studies*; and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* and "Love and The Individual", in *Love's Knowledge*. I have not attempted to cover the range of issues this topic raises. However, the topic of individuality and uniqueness is a significant feature of Romantic thought, and I therefore merely raise it at this point.



So it seems that having reached the end of his ascent, the lover's interest in the particulars with which he began, has faded or been transformed by the new vision he has attained. But the result clearly seems to be that the particulars themselves cease to have any great importance in their own right; any value they retain accrues to them merely in virtue of being reflections of something more perfect. The overall result will be to weaken our attachments to particular individuals- a result which Plato regards as necessary for the smooth functioning of the *Republic*. But this picture is difficult to accept, given our attachments to particulars. Plato's view here perhaps provides the inspiration for the Stoic view of emotions already considered, since both imply that particular emotional attachments embody an epistemological *error*.

The postulation of transcendent metaphysical entities such as the Forms, has in any case its own general difficulties, which commentators from Aristotle onward have pointed out. In addition to their *ontological* oddity, why should we suppose that the correct account for the value we attribute to individuals is in terms of some abstract entity? Why should the explanation be in that direction? Is it not plausible, on the contrary, that we develop a general idea of beauty only *through* our encounters with particulars? There may be universals such as "beauty", but there is no compelling reason to think these universals *exist* over and above their instantiations.

I turn now to the second difficulty with Plato's account, concerning the relation between the Beautiful and the Good. Here we confront the same issue we met in connection with Aristotle; that a distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic is not available. In Aristotle's case, the result was that love remained an ethical phenomenon. Plato's quite different emphasis on the *passionate* nature of love, and the fact that he is concerned with *eros*, bring it closer to the aesthetic phenomenon we recognise. But Plato, like Aristotle, does not distinguish the ethical and the aesthetic; for him, beauty and goodness are one.

One modern writer who has defended Plato on this point is Iris Murdoch<sup>20</sup>. According to her, one thing that unites the ideas of beauty and goodness is their relation to *selfish* states of the self. Murdoch claims that the value of our experience of Beauty -in nature as in art- lies in its ability to absorb us in something beyond ourselves;

“Beauty is the convenient and traditional name for something that art and nature share, and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience and change of consciousness. I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment, everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared...and when I return to thinking of the other matter, it seems less important.” (Murdoch, p.86)

The suggestion is that in perceiving the beauty of the kestrel, not merely is my attention diverted from my own concerns, but the apprehension of the beauty of the bird has a revelatory character. In grasping the bird's beauty, my appreciation of my own predicament is transformed, and I come to see my problem in its *true* dimensions.

It is a common experience that we become absorbed in our own problems, and this often involves *exaggerating* them. The failure to keep things in perspective may result from forgetfulness (the kestrel *reminds* us of the scale of value) and may even be a form of self-indulgence. This is the kind of general process that Murdoch describes as “unselfing”, and which she sees as a consequence of attending to beauty. Apart from the specific role of *beauty* in this kind of phenomenon, it is clear that having certain sorts of preoccupations can blind us to many features that something may possess. If for example I am an extremely competitive tennis player, to whom winning is of the first importance, my frustration and annoyance when my opponent

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<sup>20</sup> In *The Sovereignty of Good*. ( pp 77-104)



wins a point may literally prevent me from appreciating that his shot was a skilful (even beautiful) one. Here, my emotional state frames the situation in such a way that the perception of a range of *other* features of the situation is precluded.<sup>21</sup>

According to Murdoch, an essential component of *virtue* (in its various dimensions- in its concern with honesty, justice, courage, and so on) is precisely this capacity to perceive things *as they are*, undistorted by desire, personal bias and deceit. The just perception of things leads to compassion and love (in something like the Christian sense). Imagination is also necessary, “not in order to escape from the world, but to join it.” (p.86). The authority of virtue then derives from its capacity to see things truly, and this is also the function of art. Bad art consequently attempts to *console* us, but consolation is a form of weakness, an inability or an unwillingness to confront reality. In this way, aesthetic experience becomes an important feature of *moral education*;

“Art then is not a diversion or a side issue, it is the most educational of all human activities, and a place in which the nature of morality can be seen.” (p.84)

This then is how Murdoch pictures the connection between Beauty and Goodness. We should ask if her account is convincing. If we accept the account of the role of art in the process of “unselfing” and in *facilitating* correct perception, a question still remains concerning *what* it is that we perceive. What is it that we perceive in the works of Tolstoy or Sophocles? For these works, it may be plausible to answer, as Murdoch does, “the truth”, where this means something like, “moral truth”. So great art is also *morally* good. But what has happened to *beauty* in this account? It looks as if it has disappeared altogether, or is now being called “just perception”. However, we

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<sup>21</sup> Murdoch’s general point here is consistent with the claims I have made for the emotions, with respect to their role in framing how we see things, that they make some features salient while others recede into the background. In addition, it provides further reason for the view that education of the emotions is required if correct *cognition* is to be possible.

tend to think that in addition to being truthful and ethically wholesome<sup>22</sup> works of art are also beautiful. There is some plausibility in this identification of beauty with moral truthfulness in the cases of novels or drama, but the idea is much less credible when we think of the kestrel or other examples of natural beauty. It is also difficult to maintain with respect to works of art which have no obvious representational content, such as abstract painting, or music. In what way is the beauty of Mozart, say, ethical?<sup>23</sup>

I suggest, then, that we can make *some* sense of a distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic, although it is perhaps only in certain cases, such as the example of the kestrel, that they come clearly apart. Where does that leave us with respect to Plato's account of love? If a distinction is plausible, then beauty is *not* the same as goodness, although goodness may have its own beauty. What we have found in both Aristotle and Plato is a desire to tie love very closely to virtue and goodness; in short, a desire to say that love is love of the good. The result of the foregoing discussion will hopefully be to cast some doubt on this identification. Love should not then be thought of as an exhaustively *ethical* phenomenon. This is the view of the Romantics, and it underpins two other features of their thinking about emotion.

First of all, as we have seen, both Aristotle and Plato retain a sense of love as being a response that can be deemed *appropriate* or not. This is less explicit in Plato's account, but since the ultimate object of love is goodness/beauty itself, love is still an appropriate response to the Form of the

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<sup>22</sup> Although some may not even be that; Nabokov's "*Lolita*", the writings of Jean Genet, Riefenstahl's film, "The Triumph of The Will" are well known instances of morally dubious, yet aesthetically satisfying works of art.

<sup>23</sup> The issue is more complex than this may suggest, however, since we *do* think there is such a thing as sentimental music, for example, although it remains unclear in detail what it means to say this. Furthermore, it does not seem senseless to say that there *is* an *ethical* element to Mozart. Epithets we might apply to it, such as "serene" or "sublime" suggest that we hear the music as embodying character traits of a sort not dissimilar to those Murdoch discusses. Features of this sort are at least *part* of what is involved in the different musical experiences of listening to Mozart on the one hand and, say, Kurt Weill or Phillip Glass on the other. An interesting question which this raises is how music might be related to the education of the emotions, and what kind of failure of character -if any- a liking for, say, *sentimental* music reveals. These questions are complicated by the fact that character epithets and emotional descriptions such as "sad" and "sentimental" are applied to music in particular and art generally in a "secondary sense". This Wittgensteinian notion was discussed in chapter three.



Good. As I suggested in the previous section, this assumption about the appropriateness of love is not shared by Romantic thinkers, and has not survived in our own assumptions about love. The question of appropriateness, furthermore, is connected with the picture of love as an *ethical* phenomenon. As already argued in connection with Aristotle, once the idea of appropriateness disappears, feelings float free of any grounding, and their (ethical) value becomes unclear.

And this is precisely what occurs in Romantic thought; it is feeling, and in particular, the *intensity* of feeling which becomes all important, not whether the response is appropriate. In general, in Romantic thinking the idea that the value of emotion is to be analysed in ethical terms, in terms of character and virtue rather than *feeling*, is abandoned. With this abandonment goes the emphasis on what emotion is a response *to*; and this loss is in part at least what explains our own tendency to think of emotions as *subjective*, rather than rational. The clearest example of this, once again, is to be found in the case of love. For the Romantics love is crucially *not* a moderate state; the more intense the emotional experience the better<sup>24</sup>.

A third and final point is that the Romantic view of emotion coincides with the rise of the concept of the "Aesthetic" and its divorce from the ethical. In short, one way of summing up the difference between the classical and the Romantic accounts of the value of emotion, and in particular of love, would be that according to the former, the value of emotion is ethical, while according to the latter, it is aesthetic.

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<sup>24</sup> Romantic writers exalt the almost delirious quality of intense emotional experience; "The best of life is but an intoxication". (Byron); "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (Blake). Although intensity is an *affective* feature of emotions, it cannot, however, be divorced from the other cognitive components. Rage certainly differs from mild irritation, for example, in terms of intensity. But the objects of these emotions are also *conceived* differently.

## The Romantic Movement

It is conventional to see the writings of Rousseau as providing many of the general concepts of Romantic thought. His doctrine of the noble savage, for instance, encapsulates some of the movement's key ideas. Man, as part of nature, is, according to Rousseau, naturally good, but is corrupted by society. Here he shares with the Stoics a distrust of society and what he perceives as its false values. Freedom and strength come from ridding ourselves of the false desires and needs which society encourages in us, and discovering that what is truly valuable is what is natural and simple. In contrast to the sham sophistication of social life, man achieves true nobility, in Rousseau's view, only by returning to nature.

The opposition between individual and society enshrined in this doctrine could not be further from the Aristotelian picture. For Aristotle, only *as part* of a society with a shared conception of the good life can man fulfil his *telos* and become a complete human being. For Rousseau, on the other hand, my fulfilment as an *individual* requires that I define myself *in contrast* with society. Consequently, education and even art, as far as Rousseau is concerned, offer no genuine source of understanding, but rather merely embody society's false values. Rather than leading towards integrity and authenticity, education, in Rousseau's view, takes us further from it. The method for ridding ourselves of our false conceptions and moving closer to the truth is, as Charles Taylor puts it<sup>25</sup>, by attending to the "Voice of Nature", which is located *within the individual*. Here we can discern the beginnings of a novel conception of self-realisation; the idea of *authenticity*<sup>26</sup>; we discover our true nature as individuals by attending to what is *inner*, and the process

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pt. four.

<sup>26</sup> The history of this concept is discussed by Lionel Trilling, in *Sincerity and Authenticity*.



of discovery is one of articulation and *expression*<sup>27</sup>. This conception of authenticity as the articulation of the *inner* contrasts with Aristotle's view that fulfilment involves a grasp of our relation to a natural order which is not internal and of which we are part. For the Romantics, this account no longer has the same grip. One consequence of this change is a different understanding of the role of emotion;

“A central part of the good life [for Rousseau] must consist in being open to the impulse of nature, being attuned to it and not cut off from it. But this is inseparable from how I feel, from my having sentiments of a different sort.”

(Taylor, p.372)

In the previous section we noted that the idea that emotions are ethically valuable relies on the sense of a natural order, of what is *appropriate*. With the demise of this sense, emotion assumes a new role and a new kind of value;

“The difference with Aristotle is this; the “sentiments” valued in the Aristotelian perspective are defined in terms of the mode of life or actions they move us to, while for “Nature as source” we might just as well say that the way of life or action is defined by the sentiments. Certain feelings, such as our sense of ...joy and reverence at the spectacle of untamed nature, are just as, if not more, fundamental in defining the good life as any actions.”

(Taylor. p.372)

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<sup>27</sup> In connection with the arts, the rise of the concept of “expression”, in contrast with the classical preoccupation with *representation*, is another contribution of the Romantic movement. This transformation of our orientation towards art works is a function of a wider transformation of our picture of ourselves as related to a *Natural Order*. The claim I have been making about the emotions is directly related to this. Given Aristotle's metaphysical assumption of a *Natural Order*, the value of emotion is taken to consist in its contribution to the working out of our *essence*, as part of that order. When, as for the Romantics, man's essence is individual and not part of the natural order, but something inner - perhaps inchoate and requiring expression - then emotion, to the extent that it performs this expressive function, can be thought of as having a different kind of value. The value ascribed to expression, then, is to be explained by the fact that *what* is expressed is *authentic* ( as opposed to *false*). Beauty and the category of the aesthetic are themselves distinguished in part by their role as revelatory of what is authentic. This explains the high value ascribed to aesthetic emotional responses.

The value of the emotions does not now *derive* from their place in the good life, and from their role in constituting virtue and character. Rather, the emotions have their own value. The emphasis switches to the emotion as *feeling*. This is particularly clear in the case of love. The Romantics view love as a source of self-knowledge and self-expression; as a paradigm experience of authenticity. And in this respect, the Aristotelian sense of what is “appropriate” has no application; authenticity of emotional response, on this view, is proportional to *intensity*.

As noted in the introduction, there is a historical thread which connects the Romantics with the ancient concept of “intoxication” and its religious overtones. Writing of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, Peter Gay describes their hostility to the idea of intoxication thus;

“Enthusiasm, that much-despised ebullition of religious sentiment unchecked by reason or decorum, was one fruit of diseased imagination; theology was another. The poetic mentality, indeed- with its logic not of argument but of intoxication, a logic in which beauty is taken for truth, and proof offered through images and metaphors rather than demonstration- was therefore nothing other than the religious mentality. Hence it became the task of the critical philosopher to keep poetry from contaminating philosophy, to enjoy pleasing fictions without taking them for truth”.<sup>28</sup>

It was against this Enlightenment hostility to intoxication that the Romantics reacted. Those like Blake, for example, felt that the exclusive emphasis on Reason had mistakenly de-humanised us<sup>29</sup>. Romantic thought involved an attempt to create a space for human concerns, and for *meaning*- a concept for which the prevailing empirical philosophy had no time - but on a *secular* basis. Nowhere is this clearer, perhaps than in the writings of Kant.

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment*, vol. 2, p.215.

<sup>29</sup> Blake, writing of Enlightenment philosophers like Locke, said, “ They mock Inspiration and Vision...Meer Enthusiasm is the All in All! Bacon’s Philosophy has ruined England...”. Quoted in Gay, (Op. Cit.) p.208.



Descartes had shown how a limited kind of certainty can be derived just from the fact of subjective experience - in the form of the *Cogito*. However, to go beyond the *cogito* and establish any certainty about the world beyond the experience of the subject, Descartes was forced to resort to a conceptual device whose use he could not satisfactorily defend- God. Kant, in his first Critique, attempted to go beyond Descartes *without* the use of God. But more generally, the issue that unites all three of Kant's Critiques is *subjectivity*<sup>30</sup>; how can there be subjects whose will is free, who obey the demands of reason or morality in contrast to merely following their inclinations, and who are capable of experiencing beauty? At bottom, these issues resolve into the fundamental puzzle of subjectivity; what is it to be a *subject* rather than merely a part of the physical universe, governed by laws of cause and effect?

In Kant's third Critique, he attempts to show how objectivity is possible in aesthetic experience although beauty is not a property of objects *in themselves*. Rather, beauty is a feature of aesthetic *experience*; it is a feature of subjectivity. The project of salvaging *meaning* - free will, morality, beauty- from the deterministic world of science is something which Kant and the Romantics share, and both turn to the subject as a means of achieving it. This point is obliquely alluded to in the quotation from Gay, above. The Enlightenment philosophers distrust what we might generally class as "appearances"<sup>31</sup>. The arts, however *deal* in appearances. This is Kant's point in his third Critique. The insistence that truth can only be grasped by transcending limited subjective points of view and thereby revealing what exists "objectively", is, on this view, regarded as mistaken<sup>32</sup>. Plato too shared a deep distrust of the arts<sup>33</sup> for similar reasons- art is "mere" (and misleading)

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<sup>30</sup> This view is argued in detail by Andrew Bowie in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* Ch.1. Bowie connects the Kantian issues with the recent work of Thomas Nagel on subjectivity- for example, *The View From Nowhere*.

<sup>31</sup> "Appearance" in the sense of *phantasia* discussed in previous chapters. The role of *phantasia* in aesthetic experience is discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

<sup>32</sup> A modern defence of this position with respect to mental phenomena, free will and value, is Nagel's work, referred to above.

<sup>33</sup> This point about Plato is taken up again in chapter eight.

appearance. It is no coincidence, surely, that Goethe's remark quoted in chapter two,

“Don't look for anything behind the *phenomena*; they themselves are the theory”.

springs from a Romantic sensibility. The classical order of priority is inverted; *appearance*, what is available only from the subjective perspective, is taken as revelatory and valuable. The Platonic drive<sup>34</sup> to penetrate beneath experience to what is real or objective, is regarded as futile. Feeling in particular becomes, for the Romantics - though not generally for Kant - the experience above all others which encapsulated what it is to be a subject. Its importance derived from its connection with authenticity and self-expression - in short with the self. And some emotions were of more importance than others in this connection. Aesthetic emotion, for instance, was seen as a source of liberation and transcendence. The aesthetics of both Kant and the Romantics shared the aspiration towards transcendence which is so notable in Plato<sup>35</sup>. It is clear then that the rise to prominence of the issue of subjectivity was in large part the same process which resulted in the creation of the new and distinct category of the *Aesthetic*. Furthermore, the change of attitude towards emotion in general and towards aesthetic emotion and romantic love in particular is part of the same process.

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<sup>34</sup> That is, Soctares' insistence in the dialogues that knowledge, of the sort demanded by questions of the form, “What is justice, beauty, friendship etc...”, can only be arrived at by dialectic. The mere ability to distinguish correctly cases of justice from injustice and beauty from ugliness, does not amount to *knowledge*. It is this insistence that Goethe's quote may be taken to repudiate.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and its Enemies* vol.1 notes the affinity between Plato's theory of the Forms and Rousseau's insistence on a return to Nature. The importance of the transcendental in Romantic art is discussed by Frank Kermode in *The Romantic Image*. It is interesting that the three areas mentioned so far which emphasise *enthusiasm*- religious conviction, Romantic passion, and certain kinds of philosophy such as Platonic metaphysics and epistemology- all share a focus on the Transcendental. It may be that they are at bottom the *same* transcendental aspiration in different guises.



One of the most forceful philosophical statements of this *aestheticisation* of experience can be found in the work of Nietzsche- a writer who nevertheless sought to *dissociate* himself from the Romantic movement<sup>36</sup>. In his famous declaration that,

“...only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified”<sup>37</sup>,

we find the same attitude that led the Romantics to extol passion and intensity of feeling as the source of value; for Nietzsche it is the Dionysian ecstasy which is the source of value, and this is an *aesthetic* rather than an ethical experience. In Nietzsche’s view, we even regard *ourselves* as aesthetic objects;

“ One thing is needed- “to give style” to one’s character - a great and rare art”<sup>38</sup>

This view of character as an *aesthetic* unity, whose hallmark is a coherent sense of *style*, could not contrast more sharply with Aristotle’s conception of character as unified through *integrity* and a grasp of the good. This difference in turn suggests an alternative understanding of what it is for an emotion to be truly *mine*. We saw in the previous chapter that akratic emotions are in one sense not truly *mine*, in that they do not represent the evaluations with which I identify myself. And it need not merely be wishful thinking on my part that they are *not* mine in this sense. On the Romantic conception things

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. *The Case of Wagner*, Epilogue, and *The Gay Science* 370. For a more detailed argument that Nietzsche’s views nevertheless are Romantic, see Julian Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art* p.140-147. Nietzsche argues that Romanticism is the philosophy of “homesickness”; the Romantics are not at home in the world, are alienated from it and seek Transcendental escape. Young’s point is that Nietzsche too is alienated from the world, albeit for different reasons.

<sup>37</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, 5,24.

<sup>38</sup> *The Gay Science*, 290.

are different. What it is for an emotion to be truly mine is for it to be a form of *self-expression*, and that is signalled, as we have already noted, by the *intensity* of the emotion. The more intense, the more it is an expression of the authentic self. <sup>39</sup>

Love is taken to be one of the paradigm instances of this. And it is, additionally, as we have seen - at least in its erotic/Romantic form - an *aesthetic* experience. When we compare this view with the Aristotelian one, we find the central opposition between these two senses of an emotion's being *mine* is between the ethical conception of *character*, and the aestheticised conception of the *self*. They do not contradict one another however, they merely emphasise different things.

But I think we can generalise this point, in a way that takes us beyond the particular emotion of erotic love. Nietzsche was famously opposed -as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter- to the classical philosophies such as Aristotle's which sought to *educate* emotion. Nietzsche was implacably opposed to all such measures and strategies of "moderation". Precisely why he was so hostile to the idea of emotional education, will be addressed in the next chapter. But it seems that he prized a general sense of passionate engagement with life<sup>40</sup>, and he took it that this not only was *not* a matter of responding passionately where such a response was appropriate, but that the dominance of a sense of the "appropriate" in an individual was itself damaging. The first of these points is the one that concerns us here. We have already noted that love is one emotion for which we possess *no* sense of the features to which it would be an appropriate response. But this is not true only of love - we are passionate about an enormous range of things. Many of these passions are readily intelligible, and in some sense would be considered

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<sup>39</sup> Obviously this view raises problems; principally concerning how we can be confident that an emotion is an authentic piece of self-expression in this sense. Intensity of response does not seem in itself to preclude self-deception and even simple mistaken identification.

<sup>40</sup> For example; "...to attack the passions at their roots means to attack *life* at its roots: the practice of the Church is *hostile to life...*" *Twilight of The Idols*.



appropriate<sup>41</sup>. But many, perhaps the majority, of the things about which people are passionate are unintelligible to others, and even where intelligible, the idea that we should - or even could - share the response, even with effort, is hard to credit. Human beings become passionate about all sorts of things - most of them objectively worthless; golf, stamp-collecting, carpentry, insects, motor-mechanics, lawn bowling, train-spotting, Medieval music, martial arts, knitting and trigonometry, would be a fairly random sample of human interests. It is clearly of great significance to the individuals concerned that they are passionate about these things, and they rightly feel their lives would be the worse if they were deprived of access to their chosen pursuits. Equally, those who *lack* passions may lead lives which lack interest, excitement and even point.

Although the point of a life consumed by such passions, however bizarre, may not amount to much objectively, it may matter considerably subjectively. And furthermore we may agree that it is an *objective* matter that a life without such passions is a lot worse than it would be with them. But exactly *what* people get passionate about is an area where questions of appropriateness simply do not apply. In this respect, what we are passionate about gives life at least part of its meaning. But the fact that normative "criticism" of private passions on a par with other emotions would be a mistake constitutes at least a partial vindication of both the Romantic's general claims about subjectivity and their particular views about emotion.

Given all this, I think we can now give some content to the distinction between emotion and passion which I raised in the introduction. The term

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<sup>41</sup> The term "appropriate" may signal merely that something is an intelligible response, although there is no sense that to respond differently is a fault, or "wrong". In a stronger sense it may have this further normative implication. We apply this even in aesthetic contexts - "Harrold Robbins is not a great author!", etc. The "moral" sense of appropriate is of course stronger than this, and expresses a demand. The sense we find in Aristotle's ethical writings must be something more akin to the aesthetic sense. Emotions, we saw in ch.1, are appropriate in this sense. Some cases of love also, are appropriate in the weaker sense of being intelligible. Perhaps there is even in these cases a sense that someone who cannot share your judgement is making a mistake. That does not affect the present point which is simply that we are prepared to grant that someone may be in love though the response is unintelligible to us. To us, who cannot understand, perhaps, talk of an *appropriate* response has no meaning.

“emotion”, as I pointed out there, in certain forms implies that emotional excess is a defect. To describe someone as “highly emotional” has an implication of this sort, whereas to describe someone as “very passionate” is to say something positive about them. It is consistent with usage then to think of “emotion” as denoting the range of our affective experience within which normative criticism and the idea of what is “appropriate” have an application. “Passion”, on the other hand is better thought of as referring to the range where these notions do not apply. Returning to Aristotle, we may conclude, it seems, that the Romantics were right to insist that the value of emotion does not always derive from its relation to educated character. And if this is right, Aristotle’s insistence on what is appropriate, even in the area of friendship and love, is therefore exaggerated<sup>42</sup>. Secondly, we might also think we have grounds for suspecting that Aristotle’s account neglects aesthetic goods such as the experience of beauty, whether in art or in romantic love.

The issues surrounding subjectivity - in particular the question of how art can be a source of truth and understanding- will be explored further in chapter eight. Plato’s hostility towards art is towards *mere appearances*, which could not be a source of knowledge. *Real* knowledge, for Plato, is the product of dialectic; it is the result of argument, deduction and refutation. Chapter eight will discuss whether we should accept this claim, and I shall argue that we should not. Art offers understanding and knowledge by different means, and one of these is by the arousal of emotion and the use of *phantasia*. The role of “appearance” or *phantasia* has recurred at several points now- in its role in the account of aspect perception and in the account of emotion itself. In addition we have seen that it plays an important role in phenomena that we otherwise would have difficulty capturing with the customary epistemic vocabulary of belief. These issues were discussed in the previous chapter. In the present chapter we have considered the related Romantic notion of emotions as features of *subjectivity*. In addition to their justified opposition to the Aristotelian conception, then, the Romantics’

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<sup>42</sup> A recent (and I think unsuccessful) attempt to argue that romantic love *is* open to normative assessment is by Gabriele Taylor, “Love” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1975.



general concerns echo the general issue we have been tracing through the concept of *phantasia*.

## Chapter Six. Educating the Emotions.

Up to this point I have assumed that we can make sense of talk of educating the emotions. This assumption is crucial, for example, for Aristotle's ethical theory; in contrast, it is an assumption that the Stoics deny. As they perceived, Aristotle's explanation of the value of emotion only makes sense if the assumption is justified, and they claimed it was not. In Chrysippus' view, as we have seen, emotion can be *eradicated* but not moderated or made appropriate. However, the therapeutic practice recommended by the Stoics themselves attempts to achieve the goal of extirpation through *education*, rather than by some other means, such as drug therapy, for instance. It is time now to examine these assumptions. But hostility to the idea of emotional education has not been confined to the Stoics. In addition to the view that emotion *cannot* be educated, the claim has also been made that the emotions *should* not be educated. This may take various forms, and some aspects of it lie behind Rousseau's critique of socialisation - although he was not opposed to education per se. A more extreme declaration of this view can however be found in the writings of Nietzsche; although even here there may be difficulties in arriving at an interpretation of these claims which can be squared with other views he appears to hold.

This then is the first challenge, to explain how in principle the emotions can be educated, and secondly, to meet any objections to the view that they should be. But it is not the only challenge. A second main area of difficulty focuses on the connection between the emotions and the arts. Study of the arts forms a part of the Liberal educational programme in the West. But can the view that art *educates* really be defended? What do we learn from a Tolstoy novel or a Mozart symphony? Plato, notoriously, believed the arts *cannot* be a source of knowledge. Others, in contrast, insist that art does educate, and that one of the main ways in which it does so is by educating our emotional responses.

This putative connection raises diverse issues; such as the familiar question whether it is the function of art to arouse or express emotion, and what this might in any case involve<sup>1</sup>. More recently, another clutch of problems has been the object of philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> I leave to one side for the moment the question of the connection between the aesthetic features of a work of art and its role in our *ethical* education.



investigation<sup>2</sup>. These puzzles concern our emotional responses to fictional characters, and the hedonic quality of negative emotions in response to fiction. How, for example, can we learn anything about *life* by reading about non-existent characters? And more importantly, how can any emotional responses we have to the fate of such non-existent characters have any bearing on our emotional responses to the real world? Are not our emotional responses to art psychologically isolated in a way that makes it impossible to think of them as constituting real emotional learning? This difficulty is compounded when we consider the fact that the tragic and unpleasant events which many art works contain are experienced with *pleasure*. In what way then, *could* these responses be a preparation for and a development of, appropriate responses to real instances of tragedy and suffering?

Recent work on these issues has also attempted to bring out the implications they have for the general account we offer of emotional states. Some of these issues have already been addressed in chapter one. In particular, they have been taken by some to suggest an account of what we should think of as *real* emotion. One possible conclusion which has been reached by some is that *real* emotion requires beliefs. Thus emotional responses to art do not qualify. However, an additional, if undesired, consequence of such an account, -which we might in any case have suspected - may be that many of our emotional responses, *outside* an artistic or fictional context, also fail to count as real emotions; for example because - for various reasons - they are too *like* the emotions we have in fictional contexts. In this respect, the unreal nature of responses to fictions may *corrupt* our emotional lives and so have harmful rather than educational effects.

The idea that a study of the arts can be an important element in *ethical* education ( and hence by implication in emotional education has many defenders<sup>3</sup>. It rests on the view that the fine discriminations of judgement and emotional response involved in responding to these works, and the articulation of these, are important elements in the development of our emotional faculties. That is; it seems to take for granted that there can be a more or less straightforward passage from responses in fictional contexts to responses in real life. Of course, supporters of this view will allow that the passage need not be smooth; there will be other factors in real contexts for which fictional responses have not prepared us, and which may inhibit response, or reveal the scope of our responses to be inadequate.

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<sup>2</sup> See references below.

<sup>3</sup> For example; R.W. Beardsmore, "Learning from a Novel" in *Philosophy and The Arts*; Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* and *Poetic Justice*.



But although fiction may not do *enough* by way of preparation, still it does something, and what it does is important. For example, Jerrold Levinson<sup>4</sup>, in the course of a discussion of the pleasurable but negative emotional responses produced by listening to music, makes two claims for it. First, responses to music indicate whether we are *capable* of certain emotional responses; and second it reinforces and “exercises” those capacities;

“Since music has the power to put us into the feeling state of a negative emotion without its unwanted life consequences, it allows us to partly reassure ourselves in a non-destructive manner of the depth and breadth of our ability to feel. Having a negative emotional response to music is like giving our emotional engines a “dry run”.....Furthermore, in exercising our feeling capacities on music we might be said to tone them up or get them into shape, thus readying ourselves for intenser and more focused reactions to situations in real life.”<sup>5</sup>

( Levinson. P.327)

Suitably emended, this is the kind of defence which could be offered for the other arts too. The representational arts can, in addition, be more specific in the responses they evoke. But as noted above, we might wonder whether the transition from art-emotions to real-life ones is a continuous one.<sup>6</sup> One difficulty for the view that it is, arises from the point already made, that emotional responses in fictional contexts may be importantly unlike real emotional responses in various ways. One of these is their relation to epistemic factors such as beliefs. For it may turn out that it is precisely the harmonising of our emotional responses with other epistemic factors -like beliefs- that emotional education requires. Given this, fiction would be ill-suited to the task of real education. But in addition to this negative claim, there is a more serious charge which could be levelled against the study of fiction. Not only do our fictional responses lack the requisite epistemic factors, but they encourage a pernicious form of detachment in our emotional responses.

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<sup>4</sup> Jerrold Levinson, “Music and Negative Emotions”, in *Music, Art and Metaphysics*.

<sup>5</sup> Levinson adds the qualification that it is usually the *negative* emotions which are concerned in this.

<sup>6</sup> An additional, and familiar objection to the view described here is that it seems possible to enjoy art works without benefiting from them morally. There have been aesthetes who have been simultaneously moral monsters. Lurking in the background to this point is the alleged autonomy of art - itself a product of the Romantic insistence on the distinct category of the Aesthetic, discussed in the previous chapter.



One element of this emotional disengagement is the way in which fictional responses, even when negative, can be *pleasant*.<sup>7</sup> It can plausibly be claimed that this pleasure is only possible because our attitude is in certain ways detached, and one of the factors which crucially alters the fictional situation is that we do not *believe* it to be really occurring. Fictional emotions then lack the beliefs which their real-life counterparts possess .

One of the disagreeable consequences of the enjoyment of works of art might then be that someone accustomed to experiencing much of their emotional life in these relatively detached imaginative contexts may develop bad emotional habits. In particular, he may become not only deluded about the nature of his emotional responses, taking them to be indicative of the real thing, but he may come to regard real life contexts with the same degree of detachment as he does events in the theatre. This possibility is exacerbated by the opacity of much of our emotional life; emotional states often appear to be what they are not. This can occur in various ways. With regard to epistemic components of emotional states, for example, it may be easy to suppose that an emotional response signals the presence of *beliefs*, while in reality it does not. The situation of the novel-reader or theatre-goer with respect to their emotional responses may be in important ways not unlike that of the akratic with respect to his values. Or again, it may be easy to fail to notice that we *enjoy* certain emotions which we should normally regard as unpleasant. But it may be easier than we suppose to fail to notice that, instead of finding a situation distressing - as we *believe* we do - we in fact find some aspect of it pleasant. Emotional states are notoriously ambivalent, and one source of this ambivalence may be a conflict between the hedonic quality of the experience and our beliefs about it.

The charge against the study of fiction then, amounts to the claim that not only can it not achieve what emotional education requires (because it does not turn on epistemic factors) but that it actively *promotes* the kinds of emotional confusion which prevent emotional *education*- it encourages us to mistake false or “fictional” emotion for the real thing, and instils a form of “attenuated engagement”<sup>8</sup> towards the real world. This kind of error in diagnosing our own emotions need not characteristically involve self-deception. That would be an additional complication. But the present point does not require a defence of that idea since it involves *error* rather than deception; this kind of error may be *motivated* in some cases, but in others may simply result from the kind of opacity alluded to above.

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<sup>7</sup> One form of this difficulty is the well known Problem of Tragedy, to be discussed below.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is David Pugmire's, in “Conflicting Emotions and the Indivisible Heart”, *Philosophy* 1996.

In the present chapter I will begin by raising and exploring objections to the idea of emotional education in principle. From there I move on - in chapter seven- to a consideration of the second area of difficulty discussed above, the relations between art and emotion. Before setting out the details of recent discussions, I provide a brief overview of what the vindicated possibility of emotional education might involve in practice; what will count as emotional *education*, as opposed to mere *alteration* of our emotional states by other means. It is important to set this out, if only in general terms, since only when we have some idea of the requirements will we be able to assess the claim that the arts satisfy them. Lastly, in the second half of chapter eight I consider Plato's argument that rhetoric and the arts have no real educational value.

## Is Emotional Education a Bad Thing?

Most of us develop emotionally to the extent that we do through a mixture of learning and teaching. Explicit schooling of the emotions normally occurs only in our formative years, and thereafter we rely on our own abilities to extend, refine and entrench our emotional sensibilities. An account of emotional education should therefore aim to offer an account of this latter process - although explicit methodologies for the education of our emotions- such as phobia therapy, psychoanalysis, Stoic therapy and so on- may also be revealing about the way we alter our emotions. The difficulty that these therapies raise is that not all emotional change involves emotional *learning*. Drug therapies most obviously would not in themselves constitute a form of emotional *education*, given that they work through a purely causal mechanism<sup>9</sup>. Clearly then, what counts as learning depends on the grounds or *basis* of such change.

In advance however of an account of what emotional education is, should we accept that it is, all things being equal, an admirable goal? Generally speaking, it would appear

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<sup>9</sup> We have already encountered this problem in the discussion of Aristotle's account of habituation in chapter three. If habituation is to be a form of ethical *learning*, it cannot be a purely causal matter such as the "horse-breaking" model describes.



that we do<sup>10</sup>. Most parents regard it as desirable that at least some of their children's instincts be educated. We think children should gain some mastery over their appetites rather than become their slave. This, for instance, would be a minimal condition on the ability to deliberate effectively about ends. In a similar vein, we need to learn that restraint can be essential if we are to enhance our enjoyment of things. But in addition to these self-management techniques, most parents also regard it as desirable that their children develop the power to transcend their own particular viewpoint; that they cultivate "other-centred" sentiments, such as compassion and pity and that they learn a wide vocabulary of evaluative concepts - exaggerated, selfish, lazy, and so on - and the circumstances in which they are appropriate.

In this respect, a wholesale rejection of emotional education would appear to leave us a race of Frankfurt's "wanton's", reacting to satisfy any desire when and where it arises. How could this seem an attractive prospect to anyone? Rousseau, for example, does not reject the desirability of education as such; instead, he proposes his own kind of education, whose influence he believes will be less corrupting of our natural and more

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<sup>10</sup> Since the project of self-mastery is in large part the goal of controlling desire and emotion, the putative value of emotional education derives some support from empirical studies into the value of self mastery. In a series of tests, psychologist Walter Mischel carried out the "Marshmallow Challenge" on a range of four year olds, who were presented with a marshmallow, and told that if they could wait, without eating it, until after the experimenter had run an errand they could have a second marshmallow. The experiment was designed to pick out the children who tried and succeeded in controlling their desire for the marshmallow before them. Follow-up studies revealed that the children with self control developed into adolescents, "who were more socially competent, personally effective, self-assertive and better able to cope with the frustrations of life." (Goleman p.81). In addition they had higher SAT scores and greater linguistic abilities. A child's performance in the "Marshmallow Challenge" at age four was four times better an indicator of their later SAT scores than the results of IQ tests at the same age. So the capacity for self-restraint seems to have a bearing on the development of potential. So we do have reasons for thinking emotional education has significant instrumental value. Another interesting feature of this experiment is the methods children used to "distract" themselves- "To sustain themselves in their struggle they covered their eyes so they wouldn't have to stare at temptation, or rested their heads in their arms, talked to themselves, sang, played games with their hands and feet, even tried to go to sleep." (Goleman P.81). If we think of these as low-level strategies of emotional education, it seems not only that these processes begin very young, but that education requires a significant degree of practical intelligence; simply knowing what kinds of things will get you through a period of temptation.



noble sentiments<sup>11</sup>. A more uncompromising hostility towards education of the emotions can however be found in the following remarks from Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil";

"All these moralities which address themselves to the individual person, for the promotion of his "happiness" as they say- what are they but prescriptions for behaviour in relation to the degree of *perilousness* in which the individual person lives with himself; recipes to counter his passions..... to say it again and to say it thrice, prudence, prudence, prudence, mingled with stupidity, stupidity, stupidity- whether it be that indifference and statuesque coldness towards the passionate folly of the emotions which the Stoics advised and applied; or that no-more-laughing and no-more-weeping of Spinoza, that destruction of the emotions through analysis and vivisection which he advocated so naively; or that depression of the emotions to a harmless mean at which they may be satisfied, the Aristotelianism of morals...finally even that easygoing and roguish surrender to the emotions such as Hafiz and Goethe taught, that bold letting go of the reins..."

(B.G.E 199)

There are several distinct claims that we might separate out here. Before doing this, though, we should note that the focus of Nietzsche's attack is not merely theories which attempt to *educate* the emotions. He also, in the final section quoted, takes issue with the *renunciation* of all such attempts- a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the emotions. This is at least initially puzzling; how can Nietzsche reject both these views? Is this simply a confusion? Let us begin, then, by asking what the supposed ill-effects of education, and specifically of moral/emotional education are supposed to be.

One of Nietzsche's key concepts is "decadence" which for him involves a denial of what is vital and life-affirming. It is for this reason that he disliked the Romantics, since he regarded their views as embodying a kind of "homesickness" in the world. The history of philosophy for Nietzsche features many theories which have attempted to persuade us of the value of self-denial, and this too is the opposite of life-affirming. Chief among such views in the modern period, Nietzsche thinks, is the philosophy of Kant. He writes;

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<sup>11</sup> He writes, "Early education should therefore be purely negative. It consists, not in teaching virtue or truth, but in protecting the heart from vice and the mind from error".( *Emile*).



“To be attracted by *disinterested* motives almost constitutes the formula for decadence”(Twilight p.98).

While we might not be able to share Nietzsche's wholesale hostility towards morality, we may be able to go some way in sharing his attitude towards egoism. In chapter two we distinguished between self-interest and selfishness, and claimed that the former need not be repellent. In the same chapter, we looked at some of Bernard Williams' examples against impartial ethical theories. And in the chapter before the present one, we considered the Romantic emphasis on a range of emotion in which normative notions do not apply. What unites all these claims is that there is a sphere of legitimate self-concern which clashes with moral theories which are too impartial. Nietzsche has no sympathy with any of the traditional moralists, but he does feel a strong identification with the Homeric Greeks<sup>12</sup>. Moses Finley argues<sup>13</sup> that the values of the Heroic world were not as hostile as is our own morality to what we would describe as egoism. In the *Iliad*, when Hector decides that he must meet Achilles in combat, because this is what his sense of honour requires, he, and those around him, are aware that it means in all probability not only his own death but the fall of the city and all the consequences that will flow from that. We may well regard this as self-indulgent. But it is not simply egoistic. Hector's action springs from the values that he holds<sup>14</sup>; it may be an example of the sort of practical necessity I described earlier in chapter three.

Our own moral thinking tends to simplify matters somewhat by drawing too neat a distinction between egoistic and "moral". Something of the same distinction was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to love; that it is assumed always to be egoistic. But commitments can be expressions of the self without being selfish. For Nietzsche, who looked favourably on the values of Heroic society, the quality Hector's

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<sup>12</sup> "One is no longer at home anywhere; at last one longs back for that place in which alone one can be at home, because it is the only place in which one would want to be at home; the Greek World." *The Will to Power*.

<sup>13</sup> In *The World of Odysseus*.(p.116)

<sup>14</sup> Finley comments; "The fact is that [the] notion of social obligation is fundamentally non heroic...in the following generations, when the community began to move from the wings to the centre of the Greek stage, the hero quickly died out, for the honour of the hero was purely individual..." (p.116). By our standards heroic values show an absence of due concern for the interests of others. But something of the same charge can be put against Anna Karenina, and many other cases of practical necessity. If we look favourably on those cases, as I have argued we should, we seem thereby to endorse *some* form of egoism.



attitude exemplifies is *nobility*, and it is tempting to suggest that this is at least one aspect of what he meant in praising egoism; that the noble hero is not intimidated by adherence to a moral code of impersonal duty.<sup>15</sup> The Heroic code of values, while being not merely an expression of desire, is nevertheless an assertion of the self, in a way that Kantian morality is not. Since any code of values will involve a concept of *denial*- some actions will have to be ruled out if it is to count as a value-system at all, the Heroic code is no exception. And as noted above, Nietzsche was hostile to liberal and laissez-faire attitudes towards character and desire. But in Nietzsche's view the Heroic world, unlike the Kantian system, preserves the individual's engagement with the world. Principally, it does not extinguish the sense of intoxication with life. One of the most pernicious effects of "disinterestedness" is the disenchantment it produces;

"From a doctorate exam.- "What is the task of all higher education"?-To turn man into a machine. - "By what means?"- He has to learn to feel bored.-"How is that achieved?"- Through the concept of duty.-... "Who is the perfect man?"-The civil servant.-"Which philosophy provides the best formula for the civil servant"?-Kant's."

(*Twilight*.p.95.)

So Nietzsche is concerned not merely to argue against Kantian ethics on the grounds that it is *philosophically* mistaken, but additionally, and more importantly on the grounds that the *psychological* consequences of adopting would be extremely damaging. Indeed that psychological damage such views would wreak is the chief philosophical objection to them, in Nietzsche's view. Returning then to the issue of the education of the emotions, the process of moderation this involves is akin for Nietzsche, to the selflessness of Kantian ethics, and capable of the same damage.

Have we then shown that Nietzsche was *right* to reject the goal of educating the emotions? Not quite. At best we have shown that certain moral theories promote the extinguishing of a range of emotions that are crucial to living fully engaged lives. But not *all* of them do this, and those which do not (such as the Heroic) *themselves involve*

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<sup>15</sup> And also that he was not merely concerned to produce the best overall outcome. Nietzsche's hostility towards utilitarianism is motivated by the sense that it threatens the *character* of the individual. This sense of encroachment is shared by contemporary opponents of that theory, perhaps most notably Bernard Williams.



education of the emotions. We might, then, accept some of the points Nietzsche makes, without being forced to accept the general thesis about education.

The interpretation of Nietzsche's objection offered above, although the most obvious, is not the only one. An alternative is offered by John Cooper<sup>16</sup>. Cooper is tentative in his reconstruction of Nietzsche. He comments:

"My treatment is brief, because Nietzsche's contentions belong at a level of speculative psychology where the nature of the assessment is obscure."

(Cooper. P.64)

On Cooper's analysis, the focus of Nietzsche's attack is the scholar. In the life of the scholar, according to Nietzsche, we can perceive by analogy what goes wrong in emotional education;

"Whoever lets concepts, opinions, past events, books enter between himself and things...will never see things for the first time".

Knowledge is something destructive in Nietzsche's eyes; learning and the refinement of conceptual capacities have the result that we only confront the world through the "veil" of our classifications and reasons. So our encounters with the world lack immediacy and directness. In addition to this *distancing*, Nietzsche also claims that the aim of learning is to *dissolve* the world, and especially people, so that we encounter them as instances of *types*. In essence, Nietzsche's attack seems to come to this, that our initial encounters with the world are to a large extent unmediated by concepts. Our experience is therefore immediate and of particulars- people, say, as unresolved particulars rather than as classified instances of concepts. The real villain of this description, then, is conceptual reduction, something that Nietzsche regards as vital to "technicist" thought such as utilitarianism. Cooper writes,

"Nietzsche's point is not that there is anything mistaken, for certain purposes, with such analyses....it is rather that immersion in disciplines which conduct these reductions has an irretrievable impact upon emotional attitudes towards the objects and persons variously "dissolved" by them."

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<sup>16</sup> In Cooper, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Education*.

The question is, what is the “impact” that it has, and why is it “irretrievable”? The answer to the first part of this question is presumably that we will no longer conceive of the world in terms of particulars, and this is in many respects damaging. Let us be clear what is meant by talking of particulars. In chapter two I offered an account of ethical thinking which I termed “particularist”. On this view, we encounter a situation as a whole, without attempting to apply previously conceived rules. I argued, along Aristotelian lines, that the person of educated perception will perceive the relevant or salient features of the situation; sometimes this alone will be sufficient to indicate the right course of action, but not always. There may be cases where factors of equal importance make decision difficult. This account is particularist because the whole situation is the object of attention and not merely a pre-selected range of factors; seeing which factors are most salient requires a grasp of the whole situation. Also, judgement relies on the educated perceptions of the person and not on the application of rules or decision-making procedures.

This kind of particularism however, *requires* the application of concepts. It requires the deliberator to be able to perceive a *selfish* act, to recognise instances of injustice and shame and so on- often quite refined instances of them<sup>17</sup>. But it is not reductionist.

Kant’s account of aesthetic pleasure in the third Critique involves perceiving aesthetic objects as particulars *unmediated* by concepts. This seems to be a stronger notion of what it is to perceive a particular- that it requires the *absence* of concepts.<sup>18</sup>

Let us look again at Nietzsche’s argument. Education involves the application of concepts, and emotional education is no different<sup>19</sup>. But this process dissolves our perception of particulars, which in turn dissolves or alters for the worse our emotional engagement with those particulars. I have not yet considered the last claim in the previous sentence, but we can now see that the argument only works if a strong, Kantian-style reading of “grasping particulars” is taken. On the weaker view, grasping particulars is compatible with the application of concepts. It is just that the concepts do not exhaust the

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<sup>17</sup> But there need be no demand that they be able to produce an account of what, for example, injustice *as such* consists of.

<sup>18</sup> Although of course the object will have to be discriminated as an object distinct from its background, and therefore some conceptual capacities seem to be required.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche’s argument only requires that this be a necessary and not a sufficient condition of emotional education.



particular. When we say why we like a painting or a novel, or why we love someone, we *abstract* features from the whole, tear them out of their particular contexts and offer them as explanations. But it is the particular, undissolved object or person that is the focus of our attention.

Could Nietzsche argue that emotional education involves, not this kind of particularism, but reductionist applications of concepts? Certainly it may- perhaps utilitarianism is of this sort. The completely utilitarian child may be precisely reductionist in this way: but this is of course not an objection to emotional education as such. Indeed, the account of Aristotle I offered in chapter three shows how this result can be avoided. What then about the assumption Nietzsche's argument would require, that the effect of the dissolution of particulars on our emotions will be negative? Firstly, in what way is it negative? If it is simply that it dissolves particulars and we respond instead merely to instances of universals, then it is not clear that the *quality* of our emotional responses has been altered rather than their objects.<sup>20</sup> But if it is the quality that is altered, say the intensity, we can look to the account offered by Plato's arguments in the *Symposium*, in the last chapter, to explain why this is so. Perhaps we do tend to conceive of education as a process of increasing abstraction; and theories of learning such as Piaget's perhaps reinforce this tendency<sup>21</sup>. But to assume that education is inevitably a movement away from particulars into a realm of abstract principles is a mistake. As David Hamlyn argues, education most often involves an increasingly refined ability to *appreciate* particulars.

The arguments given above do not succeed then in showing that education of the emotions is inevitably pernicious. There is, however, an idea latent in some of the considerations we have been looking at which has not been fully brought out. This idea might be put this way; it is a familiar experience to many that education of their emotions inevitably blunts or fades their emotional experience. Michael Stocker remarks<sup>22</sup> that

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<sup>20</sup> Plato's arguments concerning love, contained in the *Symposium* - considered in the previous chapter, - are an example of this kind of "dissolution" of the particular into instantiations of universals. He too regards it as an inevitable (and desirable) consequence that our attitudes towards particulars will be less intense as a result.

<sup>21</sup> According to Piaget, the final and most advanced stage in the education of the child is that at which they are able to think abstractly and apply general principles. This view is discussed and criticised in Gilligan, *Philosophy in a Different Voice* and Hamlyn, *Education and the Growth of Understanding* ch.7.

<sup>22</sup> Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*. (p.11). He quotes the writer Roger Angell; "[we] are aware of a humdrum, twilight quality to all our doings in middle life, however successful they may prove to be. There is a loss of light and ease and early joy..."



many of people look back wistfully upon their youth as a time when their passions for things were vivid and fresh. In comparison, later life, however fulfilling, often seems to be- in emotional terms- something of a disappointment. Some psychologists also note that the unselfconscious passions of young children are dampened as they grow older, and in particular as they learn language and express themselves in it.

There is perhaps something familiar and correct about this, but it is more difficult to say precisely what it is. One claim might be that language acquisition is responsible for the dulling effect. This might be because of the fact we have been considering, that it involves the application of concepts. The effects of this could be the "Nietzschean" ones we have looked at concerning the transition from particulars to universals, or perhaps it is that through language, the child must accept public criteria for the application of concepts, and that this kind of dependency has bad effects on the child's emotional state. However, this last point is quite general in taking the ill-effects to result from education *as such*, and not merely *emotional* education. On this view the damaging transition is from a "private" world to a public one, although perhaps the child may be affected most directly by the transformation wrought in its *emotional* life.

In addition, an important element of the pre-linguistic or "pre-dissolution" grasp of particulars may be their *suggestiveness*. That is, our youth is characterised to some extent by the *promise*, difficult to capture, that we may grasp *in* a particular. This is an echo of Kant's point that our grasp of the particular transcends conceptual descriptions we give of it. This is a variation of Nietzsche's objection; here what is claimed is, not that the application of concepts commits us to reductive understanding in terms of universals, but that the *effect* of conceptual understanding is one of "disenchantment"- that the suggestive qualities of particulars, their "pointing towards" something which is not explicit is eroded by this form of understanding. We might also think of this in terms of the Stoic idea of "freshness" mentioned in chapter one; what is lost in our emotional understanding is not a belief or set of beliefs, but something of the *phenomenological* character of our emotional experience. The point about the suggestiveness of particulars can be thought of in terms of the Romantic theory of the symbol, mentioned in the last chapter. If this account can be defended, then perhaps part of the attraction of art is that it offers an opportunity to re-experience the sense of enchantment of childhood experience, the sense of *intimation*. The loss of this sense perhaps accounts for the jaded, dulled feeling Stocker refers to.

However, even if we accept some of the points made in the preceding paragraphs it is not clear that they amount to an objection to emotional education. In the first place, the



cause of the problem does not seem to be simply *emotional* education. Although the *effects* are felt in the subject's emotional life, the cause seems to be education generally and the acquisition of language. Secondly, it is not entirely clear why conceptual thinking *has* this disenchanting effect, if it does. Is it merely something that *tends* to occur as an effect, perhaps even as an *indirect* effect? If so, it might be preventable. Or is the connection stricter? This is unexplained. Thirdly, even supposing this *is* a result, it does not threaten the other (so far) undeniable *benefits* of emotional education. And so at worst there is a trade off. We sacrifice something of the phenomenology of our emotional lives for the benefits mentioned at the outset.

We should conclude then, that we have seen no conclusive reason for thinking that emotional education is, on balance, anything but a good thing. Having defended the project of such education against objections, I turn now to consider what *counts* as emotional education.

## When is an Emotion Educated?

As we saw previously, the Stoics argued that emotions could be not be educated in such a way that they were responsive to the context. They thought Aristotle misguided in believing that a response can be *appropriate*. Once aroused, they believed, emotions rapidly got out of control. They could however be *eliminated*, and this was the task of Stoic therapy. This kind of education of the emotions used a variety of techniques including the study of literature and logic<sup>23</sup>. Their goal was to alter the pupil's beliefs, the judgements he *assents* to and thereby eradicate the emotions. Can we share the Stoic view that emotional education involves the education of beliefs?

It will be clear from the account of the emotions given in chapter one and the discussion of Stoic theories in chapter three that this cannot be sufficient for emotional education. From a consideration of "aberrant" emotions alone we can see that this is not enough.

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<sup>23</sup> An account of these is given by Martha Nussbaum in "Stoic Tonics" in *The Therapy of Desire*.

Those who suffer from recalcitrant emotions, for example, already *possess* the relevant beliefs, as do those who suffer from phobias. What was claimed in chapter one was that in these cases, the goal of education must be to bring emotional responses *into step* with the beliefs. And that involves getting those involved to *see* the situation, and its salient features, in a way that embodies what they already believe<sup>24</sup>. How can this be achieved? If this question is understood as a demand for an account of the *mechanism* of the process, then we should not be surprised if philosophy is unable to provide such an account. We can see why if we compare our question with some others we might ask about other mental phenomena, such as, what goes on when I try to remember someone's name, and succeed? What did I do? Or, when I picture someone's face, how do I do it? If we knew enough about the way the brain works we might be able to understand something about the underlying mechanics of these processes<sup>25</sup>. The same goes for the phenomenon of "seeing an aspect". Yet I can obviously accomplish these and other feats without understanding *how* I do it. And there certainly *is* something that I do. I can make a determined *effort* to remember a face, or a name, to see an aspect, even though I do not, in a sense, know what I'm doing when I try. If asked for instructions on *how* to try, I would be unable to give any useful response. But my inability to describe the process need not cast doubt on the existence of a process in which I am engaged.

What, we might ask, goes on when I learn to see an aspect, or learn to hear music in a certain way? If I am told that a drawing can be seen ambiguously and I am told what the two aspects are of, I may now have certain *beliefs* about the picture; that it can be seen as an x and as a y, say. But if I am unable to *see*, and have never seen, the y aspect, will the *belief* that it can be so seen help me? Might it help me to look in the right *way* or in the right *direction*? Or for the right kind of thing? It is difficult to know, I think, because the process itself is so opaque. Perhaps if I'm trying to see the picture as an old woman, I may run through in my mind some images of old women. But when I succeed in seeing the aspect it may be totally unlike the images I visualised. So, did they help me? The belief of

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<sup>24</sup> This kind of account of learning is held also by David Hamlyn; "It is clear, however, that the issues over learning to have a certain attitude or emotion towards something turn on analogous issues over learning to see things in certain ways, since the relevant factor in the emotion is the seeing of the thing in a certain way..." (*Experience and the Growth of Understanding*. P.124)

<sup>25</sup> Whether such understanding is understanding of *the essence* of these phenomena will of course depend on the view taken of the relationship between the mental and the physical.



course is not *sufficient* since even with it I may still fail to see the aspect, but it is not *necessary* either, since I can spontaneously see the aspect prior to having the belief.

However, in cases of emotional education, where we generally *do* have ethical beliefs and values, the question is how those beliefs about values are to become embodied by our emotional responses. I said above that philosophy will be unable to say in detail how this comes about, just as it cannot explain the other phenomena I mentioned. All we can do is to say in general terms what education - whatever the details of that process are- must involve. So far, I have claimed that emotional education must involve us learning to *see* the situation in new ways, typically, in line with our values.

Granted that changes of the sort just described are what education aims at, it is clear enough that changes of the required sort might simply *come about*, by one means or another; through the passage of time, because of drug therapy, divine visitation or accident. These would not, however, necessarily be examples of emotional *learning*.

Therefore, since change alone is not sufficient, what else is required for the new emotions to count as having been learnt? If a treatment for a phobia involves a form of conditioning which gradually reduces the strength of the emotional reaction, this would not in itself count as learning. Whatever process is in operation, it may occur purely causally. This remains so even if the eventual result is that I see the object of my phobia in a different light. Tristan and Isolde come to see each other in a different light as a result of a potion, but we would not say they had *learnt* to love each other.<sup>26</sup>

One possibility is that what may be lacking in these cases is *activity*. Learning is usually something that we *do*; something that requires effort. Tristan and Isolde, however, are completely passive with respect to their new perspectives. However, we *can* learn things without effort, inadvertently. We can discover, for example, that we have learnt a tune without intending to, and we can pick up information without trying. More importantly

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<sup>26</sup> We may not even want to say that they really *love* each other. A literary example of two people who learn to love each other would be Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy, in *Pride and Prejudice*. This incidentally raises another point, that an emotion can be the result of *learning* though there is no normative sense of what is *appropriate* which is being learnt. Elizabeth Bennett learns to love Darcy but she does not learn what love is an appropriate response to. "Passions", then, in the sense distinguished in the preceding chapter, will involve learning - where they do- in a different sense to the way in which "emotions" involve learning. However, these two areas of our lives are not insulated from one another. The education of emotions may have unforeseen consequences for our passions. Some things about which we are passionate may come to seem empty, dull or in some other way lose their allure.



perhaps, we learn our first language passively. So what is lacking in the case of Tristan and Isolde if it is not activity? Evidently, it is something about the *basis* of the change in their perceptions. In cases of real learning, the ultimate grounds of our new perceptions must be in *experience*. That is; in cases where the new perceptions have some other basis, such as a chemical one or, more imaginatively, the implanting of ideas by some means or other, we are inclined to say that this does not constitute learning. But is the demand that the source be in experience a sufficient characterisation of the circumstances under which something has been learnt?

Phobias, for example typically have their origin in some traumatic *experience*. And although we might be prepared to allow that there is a sense in which phobics *learn* to see the objects of their phobias as frightening, we may suspect that the term is only extended to these cases by courtesy. It *does* however makes sense to say that I have learned to fear tooth decay because it means a trip to the dentist, or that I have learned to see my attitude as selfish. These are cases of real learning, we might think. It might be objected, however, that in the case of tooth decay what I am *really* frightened of is not tooth decay but going to the dentist ; and not even that, but the pain I experience when I go there. If I project this fear, by association, making my teeth its object, is this then any different to the phobic cases? Furthermore, many people fear the dentist even though, when they do go there, they experience no pain- thanks to the advance of techniques in dentistry. Isn't this just like a phobia?

But should we perhaps simply admit that phobias *do* involve learning? The traumatic experience that generated my phobia surely makes it reasonable to fear further instances of that sort. How does this differ from my non-phobic fear of the dentist? There are at least two related differences. First, scientists are now beginning to understand the neural processes behind phenomena like phobias and traumatisation<sup>27</sup>. Crudely summarised, they have found that neural pathways in the brain are conditioned, and this conditioning is difficult but not impossible to reverse. So, in the phobic cases, there is a purely causal explanation we can give of the phenomenon. Fearing further instances like the traumatic one *would* be rational. But that level of response is rendered superfluous by the neural conditioning- whether or not it would be rational the phobic will feel fear *anyway*. The second feature, related to the first, is that rational fears are *revisable* on the basis of new

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<sup>27</sup> A good account of this work by one of its pioneers is *The Emotional Brain* by Joseph LeDoux. Also, Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Ch. 13



information, and phobias are not. I noted above that some people continue to fear the dentist even though their recent experience of it has not been painful or traumatic. To the extent that these fears are not open to revision in this way, we are justified in thinking of them as phobic responses, the result of some kind of conditioning.

Recalcitrant emotions are also - by definition - impervious to revision in this way. However in these cases the difficulty may not be (or, not simply) that there has been neural conditioning. Here it may be that our emotional response- say, dislike of someone- involves association with some other person, perhaps a figure from childhood. The process of unlearning will involve coming to understand the process of association and thereby attempting to break it. In cases of this sort, therapy will essentially involve a transformation of understanding on the patient's part.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, education of phobic responses may involve learning.<sup>29</sup>

Can we say anything more about what emotional education will involve? We can single out at least two features that seem important. First, *appropriateness* and second, *range*. Appropriateness is a requirement of what we expect from the idea of emotional development and learning. We want to bring our emotional responses in line with what we think *correct* or *fitting*, both with respect to context and to intensity of response. We may, however, have no clear idea of how we achieve this goal, when we do. But it is reasonable to speculate that it may involve techniques similar to those employed in cases of trauma. Here though, instead of trying to loosen the stranglehold of *neural* conditioning

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<sup>28</sup> Even in the cases of *traumatisation*, unlearning the neural conditioning will also involve therapy at the level of understanding, as Daniel Goleman points out;

"The first step, regaining a sense of safety, presumably translates to finding ways to calm the too-fearful too easily-triggered emotional circuits enough to allow re-learning". (p.210) and,

"The therapist encourages the patient to retell the traumatic events as vividly as possible....the goal here is to put the entire memory into words, which means capturing parts of the memory that may have been dissociated....By putting sensory details and feelings into words, presumably memories are brought more under control of the neocortex, where the reactions they kindle can be rendered more understandable and so more manageable..."(p.212). Goleman is perhaps understandably unclear how the two levels of learning are connected.

<sup>29</sup> Even though they may not affect our beliefs (assuming we already *have* the appropriate beliefs). I therefore disagree with R. S. Peters who insists that only when a process affects our beliefs does it count as learning. Discussing therapy, he writes,

"...if [the patient] was treated by some kind of reconditioning process it would be inappropriate to describe this as a process of education. For nothing is done about his beliefs." ("The Education of the Emotions". P.198, in *Psychological and Ethical Education*.)



which prevents re-learning, we are attempting something like a milder version of the reverse effect. We are aiming to bring about a disposition which responds immediately in the correct way. This will involve some kind of habituating at some level. But it cannot just be that; it must also involve a re-organisation of our experience of things. In this endeavour, the best route to success may be to try to bring it about that we feel a *different* emotion. That is; if I respond with envy to something and I set out to re-educate my responses, I may have more success if, rather than trying to *inhibit* the response, so as *not* to feel envy, I can manage to feel another emotion, say joy. As R. S. Peters puts it,

“The development of... the “self-transcending” emotions is probably the most effective way of loosening the hold on us of the more primitive, self-referential ones.”

(Peters. P.200)

The best way to oust a pattern of emotional response then may be to replace it with a new one - although it may still be obscure how we can achieve this.

Could *art* help in this process? One obvious way it *may* help is by facilitating the process of *articulation* of our emotional responses. This would seem to be a necessary step if they are to be *available* for correction. Learning to identify our emotional reactions correctly, to express and question them is a pre-requisite of changing them. In chapter one, I mentioned those patients who suffer from Alexythemia- a particularly acute lack of emotional awareness and articulation, which as a result makes them blind to the emotions being experienced by others. But failures of identification are common in everyday experience. Near the end of “Gone with the Wind”, for example, Scarlet has a moment of emotional discovery when she realises that she has mistaken her true feelings for both Ashley and Rhett Butler. She discovers she has never really loved Ashley- it is Rhett whom she has loved all along without realising it. Assuming her diagnosis to be accurate, it is clear that her failure has been one of accurately *identifying* her emotional attitudes. And her eventual identification of them is also a *transformation* of them. The experience of reading a good book review or piece of literary criticism is often of this sort; it articulates responses that we have felt but were perhaps only dimly aware of, and through the articulation of our response the nature of our response is transformed.<sup>30</sup> Clearly then,

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<sup>30</sup> This point is argued by Stuart Hampshire in “Sincerity and Singlemindedness”, in *Freedom and the Individual*; and by Charles Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals” in *Papers on Language and Agency*.



to the extent that articulation and identification are connected, art which challenges or succeeds in forcing us to evaluate and articulate our responses may have educational effects. One insight into our emotions which literature may force us actively to come to terms with may be the ambiguity of many of our responses. Susan Feagin<sup>31</sup> offers one of Shaw's stage directions as an illustration of this point;

"At one point in ...Shaw's play "Widower's Houses", he gives the following stage direction to a character named "Lickcheese": "surprised into contemptuous amusement in the midst of his anxiety".

As Feagin points out, the possibility of this kind of ambiguity raises the question of how many emotional states a person in such a condition is actually in. Is "contemptuous amusement" one emotion or two? And if one, is it amusement coloured by contempt or contempt coloured by amusement, and what exactly is the difference? And if it takes place against a background of anxiety, does this complex constitute a new whole, or are there three distinct emotional components? Although in one way these are fascinating questions, it is not clear what really hangs on the answers, or how we can set about deciding what the answers are. Folk psychology is very imprecise in what it can tell us in answer to these questions. Most importantly, it does not embody a precise notion of what an emotion is- and as a result, any answer we offer to the puzzles above may simply look stipulative.

Merely experiencing works of art will not of course *guarantee* that we engage in this kind of self scrutiny, but it may nevertheless provide an important stimulus. In any case, it does seem that awareness and dis-ambiguation of our emotions generally is one part of the process of emotional education. But at least two questions remain outstanding about this process. First, does this not make the value of art merely instrumental? And second, as noted at the outset, it may be that responses to fiction have little bearing on the emotions we feel in real life, on the one hand simply because fiction is fiction, and, relatedly on the other, because emotional responses to fiction are not like real emotions.

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<sup>31</sup> Susan Feagin, *Reading With Feeling* p.197.

Here there are several possible difficulties. What we aim at through emotional education is to instil *stabilised* patterns of response, rather than sporadic emotions<sup>32</sup>. Responses to fiction, however, may only result in the latter, at best. Secondly, an important distinction between emotional responses to fiction and to real situations is that responses to fiction are disengaged from motivation and action. Responses to fiction don't incline us to *do* anything. But it seems that establishing connections with *action* is precisely what emotional education requires. R.S.Peters writes,

“To writhe with sympathy, to fume with moral indignation, to squirm with guilt or shame, may be more desirable than to be incapable of such feelings. But, it is surely more desirable still that these appraisals should also function as motives for doing whatever is appropriate.” (p.201)

And with respect to fictional responses, whether they *are* educational will depend on what connections (direct *and* indirect) they do have with the motivational network<sup>33</sup>. Some emotions such as grief don't typically move people to *act*, but they are nevertheless part of the motivational network. We can imagine things such emotions *would* incline us to do- for example to sacrifice something for the return of the loved-one. This raises an area of particular concern; unlike real emotion and action, fictional feeling is safe. It puts the viewer or reader in no danger and asks no selfless action of him or her. This prompts the question; in what sense are fictional emotions *real*? I return to both these questions later. The other dimension of emotional education is *range*. This means extending the range of types of emotions that we can have. Consider the case of Pip in *Great Expectations*. His is a good example of how someone *learns* to see things in a different light. In the early chapters of the book, after his first visit to Miss Havisham's he suffers a humiliation at the hands of Estella. At this moment his understanding of himself and of his humble life with Joe is transformed. He sees his hands as coarse, his vocabulary and habits as uneducated and clumsy- in short, he comes to see both himself and Joe as *shameful*. It may not, of course, be the first time that he has felt ashamed. It is however an extension of the *range*

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<sup>32</sup> Recall the Kantian objection to the emotions, considered in chapter three, that emotional responses lack the consistency of a sense of duty.

<sup>33</sup> Writers such as Kendall Walton have recently written of our emotional responses to fiction as being run “off-line” as a way of capturing their disengagement from our network of motivations. (see Kendall, “Spelunking, Simulation and Slime” in Hjort and Laver eds. *Emotion and the Arts*.)



of the emotion, and this involves the imaginative capacity to bring new things under this concept; to *see* things in new ways. Most of us have capacities for a wide range of emotions, most of which are exercised in our early development, even if in more primitive forms. But some emotions, at least in their more refined forms are learned later in life. It is conceivable that a given adult may simply not develop the capacity for emotions such as pride and jealousy. In such a case we may say that the person has not *learned* to feel pride. We talk also about *learning to love*, for example. La Rochefoucauld's famous quip that no one would ever fall in love who had not first read about it in novels, contains a grain of truth. But it is doubtful that the ability to love could be learned from scratch. And parents tend to suppose that love in some form, as a response to love given, is *natural*. Love in this form though does not require an epistemic basis; it is not a question of beliefs. Learning to love in the fuller sense however, does involve finding a basis in belief.<sup>34</sup> Here, and in the case of pride, above, extending the range of our emotions involves not merely extending our sense of the appropriate range of *objects* of given emotion, but extending our range of *kinds* of emotion. Could art help us with this? On the face of it we might think it could. Many who have never been in love can gain some understanding of what the emotion is *like* from reading Proust or listening to Wagner. This is presumably part of La Rochefoucauld's point. But, on the other hand, would it help us to *love*? It is hard to see how it could- understanding what being in love is *like* is obviously *not* sufficient for the ability to love.

The attempt to move from the understanding to the emotion, presents many difficulties. For example, with respect to a wide range of emotions there are obvious incentives which might seduce us into believing that we possess the relevant capacity. Love may be a good example. It is an emotion we all like to think ourselves capable of. It will be tempting therefore to construe our emotional responses as falling into that category. But we may find ourselves in emotional states which could plausibly be construed in this way but which fall crucially short of the real thing in some respects. Construing them as the real thing can be plausible because the identity of many of our emotions is not obvious. A good example of this is David Hamlyn's discussion of a real case concerning a trial at which he was a juror. The point which concerns Hamlyn is the nature of the defendant's attitude towards his family. Although apparently devoted to his children, always carrying

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<sup>34</sup> David Hamlyn argues this point in "Learning to Love", in *Perception, learning and the Self*.

photographs of them, and devoting himself to his wife and helping her overcome her problems, it was not clear that his attitude was really one of love;

“...even in the woman’s case, it was arguable that what was important to him was seeing himself as standing in a relation to her, just as he saw himself, with apparently less reality, as standing in a relation to his children.....What is important for our purposes is that a medical witness described him as someone who had not learnt to love, despite abundant evidence that he had a propensity to devote himself to other people.....As I have indicated, one thing that seemed very important to the man was his conception of himself as standing in certain relationships to others. At the trial, he kept referring to the woman as “My...”. It might be said in consequence that there was a sense in which.....those feelings were not quite genuine.”

(Hamlyn. P. 290)

Hamlyn remarks that we *might* interpret this as a case of self-deception, where the man does not really feel love and *knows* it, but manages to convince himself that he does. There are cases of this sort, of course. But Hamlyn regards the man in this case as less knowing. Rather than being a case of self-deception, he was simply in error; he genuinely believed his emotions to be those of love. And this mis-diagnosis on his part is a consequence, Hamlyn suggests, of his having failed to discover what love really involves and of having failed to love for that reason.

One thing the man had failed to do, Hamlyn claims, was to develop an appropriate epistemic base for his attitudes<sup>35</sup>. He had failed to ground his emotion in the right way. Nevertheless, we can see how he might have taken his emotion for love. The dangers for readers of fiction or theatre-goers is akin to the plight of Hamlyn’s defendant. Fiction may not encourage the development of appropriate epistemic bases, in ways that we shall see. We may as a result take our imaginative response to the Prelude to Tristan and Isolde as revealing our passionate nature; our compassionate reaction to the fate of Oedipus as a sign of our sympathy and concern for others; and our indignation at the inflated self-

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<sup>35</sup> So, although he allows that love in its basic form does not require this epistemic form, since it is a natural response, perhaps involving seeing-as, the mature form must be grounded in beliefs, if there is to be stability and continuity of response. If this is correct, then it follows that in the cases of *some* emotions, the ability to experience the *phantasia* will not be sufficient. In addition the emotion must be grounded in judgement and *belief*. Education in these cases must then involve education of judgements and beliefs too.



importance of Pumblechook as an indicator of our sense of justice and humility. But the question is whether these responses *do* in fact reveal anything at all about our real emotions.

To be set against these doubts however, there are experiences of the sort described by John Stuart Mill, when, during a long bout of depression he came to regard himself as incapable of caring about anything or anyone, as a consequence of his severe educational upbringing. A chance reading of Marmontel's memoirs, proved a revelation;

"..[I] came to the passage which relates his father's death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them- would supply the place of all that they had lost. A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment, my burden grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone."

(*Autobiography*. P.117)

Mill's relief was not however confined to fictional responses, and he found himself able to take enjoyment in "sunshine and sky, in books, in conversation, in public affairs...". But while we need not question the genuineness of Mill's response, it is easy to see ways in which it might not have been genuine. In the first place, the very real *desire* to feel, could have influenced his reaction. Secondly, perhaps Mill read into the scene some detail of his *own* life, in which case, although his response might be genuine enough, he would have mistaken its object. This last kind of danger is particularly pressing in responses to music, for example, where the expression of emotion has *no* object. On one account of musical experience, what the listener does is to imagine the music as an expression of their own emotional state, although the music does not indicate what the object of the sadness, say, is. Here, the listener does not *mistake* the object, but the experience seems to provide great scope for projection. This need not be a defect, but it may encourage a kind of wallowing.

Let us try to sum up what we have said about emotional education so far. First, anything that is to count as educating an emotion will not be concerned simply with beliefs. Rather it will bring experience into line with our beliefs and values. Second, the basis of the change must be in experience itself. Third, the changes can involve both developing the *appropriateness* of our responses, and also the *range* of emotions we can feel. To these two we should add a third point, that education should aim at stability and

continuity in our responses. Achieving these ends will involve instilling habits. Exactly how we do this, how we improve our emotional habits, will probably not be perspicuous to us. But there is still something that we *do*. Techniques which may be helpful in whatever it is that in fact we do will include *articulation* and *identification*. But perhaps not only that. Expanding our range may involve the exercise of the imagination in obscure ways. When I hear the Tristan Prelude as an expression of yearning, the emotion I feel (if I feel anything) may be something like that yearning itself. But this kind of extension of range involves at bottom some kind of leap of imagination.

I turn now to a consideration of two problems which concern the relationship between works of art and our emotional responses to them. The first is the "paradox" of fiction, as it has been called, and the second is the paradox of negative emotions. Discussion of these problems will help to reveal exactly how our emotional responses to fiction differ from real-life emotions.



## Chapter Seven;

### “A Strange Kind of Sadness”?

My aim in this chapter is to consider the role art might play in moral education. Since that is a very large topic, in order to restrict myself to something more manageable, I will concentrate on the role certain kinds of art, specifically novels, tragedies and perhaps films and music have in the education of our emotions. I therefore make two assumptions; first that the education of our emotions is an essential part of ethical education. Second, that it is at least initially plausible to think of our reading of novels, watching tragedies and films as potentially contributing to this process. I do *not* assume, however, that emotional education *requires* the reading of novels and the watching of films and tragedies. Perhaps most emotional education goes on without them. But since emotional education, like ethical education, is an open-ended process, these media may nevertheless make a contribution as that process unfolds.

The question I want eventually to focus on is the following; how do our emotional responses to fiction (hereafter this term will stand for the various art forms above) relate to our everyday emotional experience? One suggestion might be that when I respond emotionally to music, to the fate of a character in a novel or a drama, I give myself what we might call an emotional “workout”. This means, not only that I exercise emotional capacities I already have, but that, in addition, I may *expand* my emotional range and repertoire. Something like this is the natural way in which we might try to capture the educational role of fiction with respect to our emotions. This view is expressed by Jerrold Levinson, in the passage quoted in the previous chapter;

“The individual whose emotional faculty is inactive, shallow, or one-dimensional seems to us less of a person. Since music has the power to put us into the feeling state of a negative emotion without its unwanted life consequences, it allows us to partly reassure ourselves...of our ability to feel. Having a negative emotional response to music is like giving our emotional engines a “dry run”....Furthermore, in exercising our feeling capacities on music we might be said to tone them up, or get them into shape, thus readying ourselves for intenser and more focused reactions to situations in life.”

(“Music and Negative Emotion”)

The claims of literature in particular to a role in emotional and ethical education might seem even greater. Martha Nussbaum, for example, claims that literature educates by sharpening our perception. And part of this process involves emotional response. This emphasis on the perception of the particular- on particular people in particular situations- in ethical learning has already been discussed in chapter three. It contrasts with rival views which picture moral understanding as involving a grasp of abstractions, generalities and rules. But on this account literature in addition widens experience through the active *imagination*;

“Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling.”

(*Love's Knowledge*. p.47)

Further, in addition to engaging and *broadening* our imaginative sympathies, the experience of fiction provides other advantages over lived experience;

“The point is that in the activity of literary imagining we are led to imagine and describe with greater precision, focusing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly- whereas, much of actual life goes by without that heightened awareness, and is thus, in a sense, not fully or thoroughly lived...So literature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is sharper, deeper and more precise than much of what takes place in life.”

(p. 48/9)

Finally, in confirmation of the significance many of us find in our emotional reactions to fiction, there is the famous description from Mill's autobiography which I quoted in the previous chapter. It is in general clear, I think, then, what the role(s) of literature and music in education is thought to be. I will set them out formally;

a) Art, such as music, enables us to experience emotions. This is good *practice*. It may also be a source of self-knowledge, as it was for Mill.



b) Music and literature can enable us to widen our understanding through imagination- we are shown new and perhaps unfamiliar people, places and actions. Literature offers us a way of understanding them. This understanding involves *responding emotionally* to them.<sup>1</sup>

c) In this way, we can extend our emotional understanding in new ways. We learn to see new *things* and people as sad, selfish, ridiculous, generous and shameful. This is an extension of the *objects* we feel a given emotion towards.

d) Music and literature can also extend our range of *emotions*. Reading Proust we may learn what it is like to be in love, say - an emotion of which we were ignorant; we may share the remorse of Oedipus, and our experience of this emotion be something quite novel.

e) Through all of the above we increase our understanding of the *particular*; not of abstract general conceptions or rules.

These claims will be evaluated in the second half of the following chapter. However, an assumption made by them is that there can be a smooth transition from our emotional responses to fiction to our emotional responses in real life- and this is the assumption which I will focus on here. There might be various difficulties with it, but the one I will concentrate on is this- that for various reasons our emotional responses in *fictional* contexts are too unlike *real* emotions to help with our real, non-fictional emotional lives. However, in virtue of these dissimilarities, a more worrying prospect than this also emerges. This is the thought that responding emotionally to fiction may establish bad habits, so that our emotions in *real life* may in many cases be too like the emotions we feel in response to *fiction*.

Developing these worries will involve, first of all saying in more detail why emotional responses to fiction are distinct from emotional responses to real objects. To do this I will set out and discuss two well known paradoxes, the Paradox of Fiction and the Paradox of

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<sup>1</sup> This again involves the thesis of earlier chapters that emotional response can be a distinct kind of understanding.

Tragedy, or Negative Emotion. I begin, however, by considering the nature of emotional ambiguity, since it will turn out later that this has some bearing on the nature, not only of emotional responses to fiction, but of many of our “aestheticised” emotions in everyday life.

## Ambiguous Emotions.

We generally assume that the experience of emotional ambiguity is sufficiently familiar to us. As a first attempt to describe the phenomenon- and given a *cognitive* account of emotions- we might think that it is the *thought* component of an emotion that is ambiguous. Furthermore, if we take the term “ambiguous” to mean strictly *contradictory*, then ambiguity will require me to assert a given thought *and* at the same time deny it. But this seems to place a great strain on our capacity to compartmentalise contrary thoughts. Ambiguity in *this* sense constantly threatens to become obvious, and once obvious will create pressure for a resolution, since rationality demands that one of two contradictory beliefs has to go. But the whole point about emotional ambiguity is surely that it is supposed to linger, in a way, *outside* the scope of rational resolution of this sort.

If we move to a weaker notion of ambiguity, we might try the following example. If my friend and I both enter a competition and he wins, I may be both happy at his success *and* upset that I did not win. However, while familiar enough, we may doubt whether this situation *is* really ambiguous. Talk of emotional *ambiguity* is an attempt to capture a *conflict* of some sort within an emotion or between an emotion and something else. But is the thought that it is good that he won obviously incompatible with the hope that I would win? Not strictly; the thoughts need not be antagonistic- in fact there is nothing contradictory even in the impossible hope that *every* competitor might win. Of course, I know that only one person *can* win, and knowing that, I may hope that that person will be *me*. But it seems clear that I can feel happiness for *his* victory and sadness that I have lost, *without* feeling any kind of conflict; I might genuinely wish him well in his success while lamenting my own poor performance.



If, on the other hand, I felt happy at his victory but also *resented* his winning, this *does* involve some kind of contradiction. Is it, however, a contradiction in the *thoughts* the two emotions involve? The thought that (a) he did not deserve to win (as much as I did, say) does *seem* to conflict with the thought that (b) it is good that he *has* won. But *must* they conflict? I think we can imagine circumstances in which they are in fact compatible. The friend who is pipped at the post- as they see it, by luck- (and so holds belief (a)) need not be unhappy or resent his friend's victory. And so someone might hold both (a) and (b) without any conflict.

What is left out by focusing on *belief* in ways we have been considering is the vital fact that emotions involve *affects*. If there is a contradiction between (a) and (b) it is because of the way the people are affected by them. If someone holds belief (a) and on the basis of it resents his friend's having won, then it clearly *would* be odd to also find him holding belief (b). But this is to restate the conflict at the level of emotions, not to explain it. So conflicting *beliefs* of the sort we have looked at are not sufficient for emotional ambiguity. One suggested explanation of this fact - one which is consonant with what I have claimed in previous chapters- is that the cognitive elements of emotions are not beliefs. If I am right in claiming that the cognitive element is a gestalt or "seeing-as", this might explain the incompatibility; it would be an improvement on beliefs since it would show how the cognitions themselves might be incompatible. To see things as unjust in the relevant way, just *is* to be affected by it . This is the sort of account suggested in earlier chapters.

But whether or not we accept this account of the nature of emotional states, a natural assumption which we have made so far about emotional ambiguity is that it involves experiencing *contradictory emotions simultaneously*. But is it really the case that we feel, say, happiness and guilt at the same instant? I think there are two considerations that tell against this description. First of all, if we reflect on experience it is more typical to think instead of feeling them *serially*, one after the other. If I have ambiguous feelings about someone, for instance I will typically experience these *alternately*. Indeed the idea that I can experience two emotions simultaneously is rather puzzling. Nevertheless, we may refuse to give up our intuition that we experience *something* simultaneously. We need not, however, deny this. But a second consideration suggests that whatever it is that we experience, it is not simultaneous discrete emotions. This is simply the fact that the ambiguity we are familiar with does not seem to be that between say, anger and joy, since these are *separately identifiable* emotions. The experience of emotional ambiguity, however, has an elusive quality- we sense that the elements in conflict are not discrete, but



in some way *fused*- it is natural to talk of our joy being *tinged* or *coloured* by anger. But this suggests something other than two simultaneous yet discrete, emotions.

We might, in view of considerations of this sort, offer a different account of ambiguity- in terms of *split-level* emotions; that is, emotions of different orders. I may, for instance, be angered by my guilt, proud of my compassion and disgusted at my selfishness. All of these reactions involve second order reactions to first order emotions. But neither this nor the serial explanation seems to capture the essence of ambiguity. Both explanations *separate* the contradictory elements. If we find the explanation in terms of a contradiction at different levels or between emotions had serially, disappointing, this perhaps reveals something about the nature of the conflict in cases of ambiguity.

What is worrying about emotional ambiguity is that it seems to reveal a lack of *single-mindedness* on the subject's part. And this kind of disunity of perspective - as we have already seen - can exist between judgements or between beliefs and emotions, or between desires and emotions( Recalcitrant emotions exemplify this kind of conflict with beliefs or judgements). We have already seen some reason to think that emotional ambiguity involves, not two separate, but in some way contrary emotions, but a third entity which is neither one thing nor the other, but in some way an amalgam. An example of this was offered in the previous chapter - Shaw's stage direction "contemptuous amusement in the midst of anxiety". What remains unclear is what the "elements" of this amalgamated entity are and how they come into conflict. Since they are - *ex hypothesi* - not whole emotions, it remains to be seen how the conflict (which we have concluded is a necessary feature of ambiguity) is generated and in what it consists. Something of this kind of emotional ambiguity is familiar - however obscure the details may be - from the well known problem of tragedy, and consideration of this problem may shed light on emotional ambiguity itself. The ultimate goal of this discussion, recall, is to illuminate the relation between emotional states in real and fictional contexts, and to see how experience of the latter might have a beneficial effect on the former. Before outlining the problem of tragedy, it will be helpful - for reasons which will emerge shortly- to have an account of the related paradox of fiction.



## The Paradox of Fiction.

We can state the paradox of fiction succinctly in the following three premises<sup>2</sup>.

- 1) Emotions typically involve beliefs in the existence and features of the objects of those emotions. If I am frightened of a lion, I *believe* I am in danger. If I pity you for your suffering, I *believe* you to be suffering.
- 2) When we are reading novels or watching films and tragedies, we are aware that what we are watching is not real. We do not, therefore, *have* the relevant beliefs about these objects which are known to be fictional.
- 3) We frequently experience emotional reactions when reading or watching fiction. I feel terrified by Dracula, I pity Anna Karenina, and I share the guilt of Raskolnikov.

The apparent paradox then arises out of the features of our emotional responses in fictional contexts. Specifically, they lack important sorts of beliefs, and those beliefs are necessary - so it is claimed- if something is to be an emotion at all. The various solutions to the paradox involve denying one or other of the premises.

One solution would be to deny premise (2), and insist that theatre-goers and novel readers *do* in fact believe- while they are caught up imaginatively in them- in the existence and qualities of the characters and situations. This alternative, however, pictures theatre goers unflatteringly; as easily gulled by appearance. Additionally it does not ring true. People do *not* generally jump onto the stage to protect Desdemona from the homicidal Othello, as they presumably would if they believed what they were watching. Furthermore, in its "suspension of disbelief" variety, it suggests that the suspension can be carried out *at will*. And this implausibly assumes that our beliefs are subject to the will.

We might alternatively deny 1), that emotions require beliefs. This is the alternative I have favoured in previous chapters<sup>3</sup>. Phobic fear, for instance, is a case of an emotion that

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<sup>2</sup> Discussions of this Paradox which I have drawn on include, Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*; Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions", *Journal of Philosophy* 1975; Alex Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1993; Derek Matravers, *Art and Emotion*; and Jerrold Levinson, "Emotion in Response to Art" in Laver and Hjort, (eds.) *Emotion and The Arts*, 1997.

lacks the relevant beliefs. Recalcitrant emotions are also of this sort. On this basis, I suggested it would be better to think of the cognitive component of emotions as a “seeing-as”. So it may seem that I am denying (1) myself. But whether that is true or not, phobic and recalcitrant emotions, although lacking beliefs about the *qualities* of their objects, may - it is claimed by some<sup>4</sup> - still involve beliefs in the existence of the *objects*. These *existential* beliefs explain why phobics still run away from the objects of their phobias, even though they do *not* believe them to be genuinely dangerous<sup>5</sup>. “The sticking point of the paradox of fiction is the dimension of existence or non-existence.”, says Jerrold Levinson<sup>6</sup>. So even phobics need to believe in the *existence* of what they are frightened of. I do not, however, think this argument succeeds, but I will not present an argument against it until the next chapter. However, in anticipation of that argument, I therefore conclude that rejecting assumption (1) is my preferred alternative.

What, however, about rejecting (3)? Can we claim that, despite appearances, we do *not* experience emotions in response to fictional characters and situations?

One way we might do this is to claim that while the focus of our emotions is the fictional characters or situation, these are really just surrogates. The *real* object of our emotion is real people and real situations, for which the fictions stand proxy. This solution aims to solve the paradox by claiming that our emotions take *real* - and not fictional - objects. The trouble with this solution is that it distorts the phenomenology of the experience of fiction. It is probably true that in the background of our experience of reading about fictional

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, I noted in chapter three that the Stoic strategy of redefining emotion so as to refer only to the assent, as a means of avoiding counter-examples, has much in common with the same strategy of those like Kendall Walton in “Fearing Fictions”, who defines an emotion as involving belief. In a later article, Kendall talks of responses to fiction being “run off-line”. He takes this to be a way of explaining the fact that these emotions lack *beliefs* and (consequently) do not lead to behaviour. But phobias also lack beliefs, yet they *do* involve behaviour; people still want to run away from what they are phobically afraid of. This suggests that being run “off-line” has nothing especially to do with the absence of beliefs. The lack of connection between emotion and motivation cannot be explained simply by the absence of belief. A possible reply to this objection might be simply to distinguish between two *types* of belief- beliefs about *existence* and beliefs about *appropriateness*. (See below). These issues are pursued further in the next chapter. Cf. Walton, “Simulation, Spelunking and Slime” in Hjort and Laver eds. “Emotion and the Arts.

<sup>4</sup> For example by Jerrold Levinson in “Emotion in Response to Art” in Hjort and Laver (Op. Cit.)

<sup>5</sup> In fact I think this reply does not succeed, and explain why in the following chapter. For the moment, I accept it.

<sup>6</sup> In Levinson (Op. Cit.).



characters and situations, there *are* experiences of real people and situations like the fictional ones. But while this is true, our experience of emotions is in the end for those fictional characters. If I despise a fictional character, this may be in part because I have met and despised such people in real life. But my present contempt cannot be reduced to my contempt for them; in the end, it is directed at the fictional character. I conclude that unless we endorse the claim that all emotions must involve *beliefs* (the previous alternative), we have no grounds for insisting that emotions about fictions are not real emotions<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, it is true that I do *not* believe that the suffering I read of in a novel or watch on the stage is really happening to anyone. And this does make a difference to my experience; it is not as horrible- nor do I try to stop it. In fact, I *enjoy* it. But if what I experience in the theatre, say, really *deserves* to be called pity, how *can* it be pleasant? This question brings us to the second paradox.

## The Paradox of Tragedy

We can state this second paradox as follows. Tragedy involves the experience of what we might call “negative” emotions; fear, pity, horror and so on. But these emotions are typically unpleasant. If I witness someone experiencing great pain and suffering this is characteristically an experience I would not care to repeat. Yet theatre-goers who emerge from a production of the Oedipus plays, during which they have seen a city visited by a curse, someone unwittingly murder his father and marry his mother, and then gouge his eyes out in an attempt at atonement, will say they have spent a marvellous evening in the

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<sup>7</sup> While I conclude that emotional responses to fiction are instances of *real* emotion, I do not think this is the end of the matter. Above all, it does not follow from this that there is no problem about the relationship between emotional responses to fictions and our real-life emotional responses. The potential problems for any view which endorses the educational effects of aesthetic experience on our everyday emotional lives are not, then, solved by settling this question. In particular, the possibility remains that other features of aesthetic experience- to be considered below- may have a corrupting influence. This is because, while we may allow that responses to fictions are *real* emotions, what we want emotional development to achieve is *integration*, and this (as we saw in the previous chapter) may require that our emotions *do* come with the relevant beliefs. Some real emotions, then, may simply not be up to the task of emotional education and character-building.

theatre. Since these emotions are unpleasant, how can we enjoy them? And if we *can* enjoy them, can they really *be* those same emotions?

One way of looking at this problem might be to see the challenge as how we can have two distinct emotional reactions simultaneously; how can I experience pleasure and displeasure, say, at the same time. This is perhaps puzzling in its own right<sup>8</sup>, but the problem of tragedy is more puzzling in a way, because here the pleasure does not merely co-exist with the sadness, but they are connected. As Hume notes, the spectators of a tragedy,

“...are pleased *in proportion as* they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs and cries to give vent to their sorrow and relieve their heart, swollen with the tenderest sympathy and compassion.”<sup>9</sup>

In the words of John Hospers, quoted by Marcia Eaton<sup>10</sup>, “Strange kind of sadness that *brings* pleasure”. So it is not merely that we have a painful and a pleasant experience concurrently, but that they are in addition related. If we were offered the possibility of a *reduction* in the sadness of the tragedy, most people would refuse it, since their pleasure would thereby also be impaired. The question then is how we should explain this.

Hume’s own solution might be dubbed a “conversion” theory. He argues that since our experience of fictional suffering does not involve existential beliefs, this qualifies and reduces its unpleasant nature (p.127/8), and in fact converts it into a *pleasure*. In this process of conversion, the experience of the other aesthetic qualities of the work play an important role;

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<sup>8</sup> For example, if someone stands on my foot at the cinema, while I am enjoying a film, do I continue to enjoy the film while at the same time experiencing the pain, or does the pain distract my attention from the film and take its place?

<sup>9</sup> David Hume, “Of Tragedy” in *Selected Essays*, (p.126).

<sup>10</sup> Marcia Eaton, “A Strange Kind of Sadness”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 41. Other discussions of this issue are, Alex Neill, “On a Paradox of the Heart” *Philosophical Studies* 65; Noel Carroll, “A Response to Alex Neill” *Philosophical Studies* 65; Berys Gaut, “The Paradox of Horror”, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1993; Flint Schier, “The Claims of Tragedy”, *Philosophical Papers*, 1989, and Susan Feagin, “The Pleasures of Tragedy”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1983.



“... the exercise of these noble talents, together with the force of expression, and beauty of oratorical numbers, diffuse the highest satisfaction on the audience, and delight the most delightful movements. By this means, the uneasiness of the melancholy passions is not only overpowered and effaced by something stronger of an opposite kind, but the whole impulse of those passions is converted into pleasure...”

(p.129)

In addition, since tragedy is a form of imitation, and since imitation is always pleasant, there is yet another positive factor which converts the unpleasant emotions into pleasures. So, the conversion requires an absence of existential beliefs, pleasure in aesthetic qualities of expression and pleasure taken in imitation for its own sake.

Some of what Hume says seems right, on the basis of what we have already said about emotions in fictional contexts; lacking existential beliefs the experience is not as vivid, or as vividly unpleasant as experiencing the real thing.<sup>11</sup> But although make-believe emotion is *less* unpleasant,<sup>12</sup> it is not automatically pleasant. I can *imagine* being in a variety of terrifying situations or suffering a variety of unpleasant fates, and these experiences are *unpleasant*, though in a “make-believe” way.

There are at least two difficulties with Hume’s account however. First, as Susan Feagin<sup>13</sup> remarks, for unpleasant emotions to be *mitigated* by pleasures would be one thing. Sweetening a bitter pill is something we are familiar with. But Hume’s claim is that the pleasures *convert* the unpleasant experience into a pleasure, not merely that they mitigate it. How this occurs is not explained, however. The second problem is that the paradox is dissolved by supposing that the experience of tragedy is in fact totally pleasant. It is not, on Hume’s view, that negative emotion is overcome in some way but remains intact, with the result that we have both negative and positive elements. On Hume’s view the experience is totally pleasant since the negative elements have been transformed. But this solution seems to deprive us of the *ambiguity* of the experience, which is that there *is* something negative or unpleasant about what is also a pleasant experience.

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<sup>11</sup> In Humean terms, the distinction between *impressions* and *ideas*, seems analogous in a way to the difference between real and fictional emotions.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth emphasising that a fictional emotion is less unpleasant, not merely in the sense of being less *intense*, as a pain might be less intense. It’s content is different. It is less painful because we know its not happening. This is what we should expect since pain and pleasure are themselves intentional phenomena.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Feagin, Op. Cit.

Can an experience *be* both pleasant and unpleasant? If we experience the *same thing as* both pleasant and unpleasant, that requires some explanation. In the case I imagined above, when someone stands on my toe in the cinema, it may be that I experience both pleasure and pain, though not in the same thing, and probably not at the same time. In other cases, may I experience pleasure and pain at the same time though not in the same thing? In the midst of my grief, for example, I may happen to eat my favourite ice cream. Perhaps I will not enjoy it with the usual gusto, my attention being absorbed by other things. Yet cannot a certain amount of pleasure survive, so that I can still enjoy my strawberry Sunday in a muted way - through my tears? It certainly seems that this *may* happen. More interesting, in a way, is the case where it does not. It might equally be, surely, that my experience may *destroy totally* the pleasure I formally took in my ice cream. In such a case, it would be, not that I experience the usual pleasure and am indifferent to it, but that the experience is simply *not* pleasant. Surely pleasures can be ruined by illness and boredom and other things in just this way. If so, this would seem to be an instance of the possibility raised by Hume's account, that a pleasure may be *transformed* by something unpleasant, and not merely mitigated. However, while it loses its pleasure, it does not thereby become *unpleasant*. And that would be the equivalent of Hume's claim.

If we are reluctant to accept that a pleasure *can* be transformed in this way, it is probably because we are thinking of pleasure as a sensation. But pain and pleasure depend -at least within certain limits- on how we conceive them. Occasionally we experience sensations about which we are initially unsure- we do not know whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, and only after a moment or two can we tell. An interesting example of the way pain might depend on how it is conceived is that of the masochist. Should we say that the masochist experiences pain in the way others do - that is, *as unpleasant*- but finds *that* experience pleasant? Or should we say that the pain he experiences is transformed into something like a pleasure, in the way the pleasure of the ice -cream was transformed? In the first description, he has two experiences; the pain and then a second-order response to that pain, namely pleasure. On the second description, he experiences what to others would be an unpleasant experience as pleasant; its nature has been transformed. Neither of



these is obviously implausible. But perhaps such transformations, if they exist, can only be achieved within certain limits; some pains may just remain stubbornly painful.<sup>14</sup>

Is it plausible then to think of our experience of tragedy as involving transformations of the unpleasant along these lines? The main reason for rejecting this account, as I noted above, is that it seems to deprive the experience of tragedy of its ambiguity. If what is transformed, namely the negative emotion, becomes pleasant, the experience is simply pleasant. And this account seems wrong. But think again of the masochist's pain. If it is transformed, it becomes pleasant, but it is still the case that *what* is pleasant is the pain. Since the pleasure is *in* the pain, something of the original nature of the pain must remain, if it is still to be the *pain* that is pleasant. It cannot, we feel like saying, be *merely* pleasant. Yet if it *is* pleasant, how can it *be* pain? What we encounter here is a reformulation for the case of pain, of the original problem of tragedy with which we started.

The conceptual difficulty is how we can transform an experience which is negative into something that is positive, while allowing something negative to remain, so that it is not merely positive. Another example of this is danger. When we watch horror films or go on roller-coaster rides, we are frightened. But not nearly as much as we would be by some real and present danger. If someone *enjoys the* fear of their roller-coaster ride, how should we describe their experience? They experience "make-believe" fear, which is not the same, we have said, as real fear, but still perhaps unpleasant.<sup>15</sup> And people who enjoy roller coaster rides take pleasure, not merely in the ride, but in the thought that there is an element of *danger* about it. It is the sense of danger that is exhilarating. This is the roller-coaster analogue of Hume's point that an audience takes pleasure *in* their sadness. Should we say that the experience of the make-believe fear is basically unpleasant but that pleasure is then taken *in* that unpleasant experience, or should we say that the experience is transformed, with the result that the experience is pleasant? If we adopt that second description the familiar problem is, what has become of the negative element? Is the experience *simply* pleasant?

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<sup>14</sup> There is a parallel here with the question considered in chapter three concerning the perception of aspects. While a range of aspects are clearly learned and may be subject to the *will* (as Wittgenstein and Scruton claim) some can seem unavoidable. To see something *as* green, solid or *as* an object seem less under our control.

<sup>15</sup> Again I can *imagine* standing at the edge of the roof of a very tall building. This imaginary experience is unpleasant, although not as much as the real thing would be- beliefs make a difference.

Clearly it cannot be; when we watch *King Lear* or read *Anna Karenina* we do not experience unalloyed pleasure; we are in *some* way pained by the fate of the characters in these works, even if we take pleasure in it also. But equally, the experience does not have the same unqualifiedly negative hedonic tone that experiencing such events in real life would have, and this seems to be related to the evident fact that we do not believe they are really occurring. But the problem of what the pleasant and unpleasant elements are in detail, remains. Nevertheless, according to what we have said so far, we can think of some of our responses to fiction as giving rise to experiences which are ambiguous to the extent that they contain pleasure and displeasure .

A slightly different account is offered by Susan Feagin<sup>16</sup>. According to her, our response to tragedy involves *two* emotions, one direct and the other indirect. First, my direct response to the tragedy is the “make-believe” negative one of compassion, pity, sadness, etc, which is unpleasant but not as much as the real thing. I then have a second-order response to that emotion, which is a pleasant one. She writes,

“Whence the pleasure? It is, I suggest a meta- response, arising from our awareness of and in response to, the fact that we do have unpleasant direct responses... We find ourselves to be the kind of people who respond negatively to villainy, treachery and injustice. The discovery...is something which, quite justly, yields satisfaction.”

(p.307)

There are at least three worries we might raise about this account. The first is about the response itself. Since the meta-response is a response to my own emotion, it is not a response to the *play*, obviously. But the point about the alleged ambiguity of our responses to tragedy seems, then, to disappear, since the pleasure and the pain are felt towards different things. But since one of these reactions is not to the play at all, our appreciation of *it* seems unambiguous. Secondly, is it clear that these second-order reactions *are* as healthy as Feagin makes them out to be? On the face of it they seem to reveal an unhealthy preoccupation with *oneself*. We need not deny that people have responses of this sort, but there is room for doubt that Feagin’s analysis captures the typical response. Third, according to Feagin, this kind of meta-response is all right in fictional contexts, but would be in poor taste in the face of *real* suffering,

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<sup>16</sup> Feagin, (Op. Cit.)



“In art...however, one experiences real sympathy without there having been real suffering, and this is why it is appropriate to feel pleasure at our sympathetic responses...whereas it is not appropriate to feel pleasure at our sympathetic responses in reality. There, the sympathy comes at too great a cost.”

(p.312)

But if our self-satisfaction *is* justified in the fictional context, why isn't it equally justified in real contexts? If I *do* feel the right thing, is it not legitimate to feel satisfied whether the context is real or fictional? Most of us, I'm sure, would agree that such a response *would* indicate some error of judgement, but this may be because we take a different view of what is going on in the fictional cases. The conclusion that I think we should reach is that Feagin's two-level response should be rejected. It is not, however, one of my aims to offer a full account of our experience of tragedy, and for my purposes the conclusion already reached is sufficient- that it involves *both* pleasure and pain.

Returning then to the topic with which I began, that of emotional ambivalence, we may now see more clearly one way in which our emotional lives may be ambiguous; we can experience *negative* emotions towards things, which are *pleasant* to experience. A strange kind of negative emotion indeed, but it is an open question whether it is one that is restricted to our experience of fiction. What makes this transformation possible, in the fictional context, we have seen, is that emotional responses to fiction lack existential *beliefs*, and as a result, they are less unpleasant, and they do not motivate us to act in the way real emotions do. The result, we might be prepared to say, is a kind of *disengagement*<sup>17</sup>. The question which suggests itself now is whether other areas of our emotional lives might be disengaged in a similar way. That is, could it be the case that many of what we take to be our *real* emotions towards existing things are in fact disengaged in the way fictional emotions are? And if so, what, if anything, does that imply about the reading of fiction?

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<sup>17</sup> What Davud Pugmire calls “attenuated engagement” (“Conflicting Emotions and the Indivisible Heart”, *Philosophy*, 1996).

## Real Emotion and Attenuated Engagement.

In considering the Paradox of Fiction, I asked whether emotional responses to fiction which lack appropriate beliefs deserve to be called *real* emotions. And my argument for thinking that they should will be given in the next chapter. In earlier chapters I have argued that emotions involve *appearances*, a cognitive element quite distinct from belief. So, to revert to my standard examples, phobias and recalcitrant emotions lack beliefs but are still real emotions, since they involve this kind of cognitive element; phobic fear is still *real* fear. On the other hand, if I witness someone who really is suffering and experience something like the pity I feel in response to fictional cases, we would rightly think this a defect of some sort. Nevertheless it is a real emotion. Equally, akratic emotions, such as the case of laughing at the racist joke may not represent what I *really* believe, or what my real values are -but it too is a real emotion.<sup>18</sup>

It is also true that it would be odd to experience emotions typical of fictional contexts in real life situations, particularly ones involving pain and suffering. Nevertheless, the points already made open up several more alarming possibilities with respect our real-life

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<sup>18</sup> David Pugmire has recently argued that there are some emotions which *do* demand a proper basis in judgement and belief if they are to count as real emotions. The two examples he offers are “fondness” and “rejoicing that I have been reprieved”. In the first of these, my fondness for someone may be drug-induced and my real judgements about the person remain unaffected. This, suggests Pugmire, is not *real* fondness. In the second example, I cannot really rejoice that I have been reprieved if I do not *believe* that I have been. In the first of these cases though, I would claim that if my perception of the person is altered, it may be real fondness whether it represents my true beliefs and judgements or not. It is one question whether an emotion *really* reflects my judgements, but a quite different question whether- irrespective of the answer to that question - it is a *real instance* of that emotion. If the fondness involves no cognitive alteration, I would claim it is not fondness at all, real or otherwise. In the second of Pugmire’s examples, it may be true that in a sense I cannot rejoice *that* I have been reprieved while not believing this. However this does not seem to me to establish very much. There may always be *something* I have to believe in any case of emotion. The point however is whether I must believe the *representational content* of the emotions; need I believe that my experience of something as horrible or terrifying is true? I have argued that we don’t. See Pugmire, “Real Emotion”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, March 1994.



emotions. One is that, parallel to the phobia case which is not based on judgement, I may experience “facsimiles” of emotions which I do not *really* feel. The worry here is, not that the emotion is not a real emotion, but that I take myself to have a full emotion, complete with the relevant judgement (belief), when in fact I do not. Imagine that you experience what you take to be grief- everything about it is indistinguishable from grief. But grief - in most cases- does involve the genuinely assented to judgement (in addition to the relevant *appearance*) that something of great value has been lost. It may be possible to discover, however, that the real judgement is not one you hold; you do not *really* believe it. Michael Stocker offers a less dramatic example of the same phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> You may, on hearing the details of your friends’ recent trip to Spain, suddenly recall your own previous visit there, and as a result of listening to their enthusiastic stories, suddenly conceive a desire to return there yourself. However, later you may recall that really you disliked it there and have no real desire to return. Their enthusiasm infected you and created a facsimile emotion, which seemed to embody judgements you did not in fact hold. And the account of emotions offered in chapter one makes it clear how such a thing is possible; it is easy to take the appearance for a judgement, and this for the reason which was suggested in

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*. Another way such facsimiles may arise is through mimicking or acting out. Football supporters act-out emotions and as a result come, no doubt, to feel something like the real thing. Psychological research may reveal something of the basis of phenomena of this sort. In the “Feedback Reaction” discussed by Laird, subjects asked to mimic facial expressions associated with various emotions reported feeling slight signs of the emotions themselves. Laird quotes the following lyrics from Rogers and Hammerstein;

“Whenever I feel afraid,  
I hold my head erect  
And whistle a happy tune  
So no one will suspect I’m afraid.  
The result of this strange deception,  
Is very strange to tell,  
For when I fool the people I fear  
I fool myself as well.”

Cf. James Laird, “Emotional Self-Control and Self-Perception” in R. Harré, (ed.) *The Emotions*. Laird’s example is also cited in Mary Haight, *Self-Deception*. Christopher Janaway also attributes this point to Plato as one of the reasons for his hostility towards the arts- that it promotes *assimilation* to what is experienced. Cf. Janaway, *Images of Excellence*.

chapter three, and which will be developed further in the next chapter, that the appearance is *convincing*- quite apart from whether it is believed or not. Consequently it is not easy in many cases to distinguish a facsimile version from emotion with judgement.

A notorious instance of this difficulty arises in the case of love (“do I *really* love him?”)- perhaps because we are, in addition, unsure what the judgement *is* that we should be endorsing if our emotion *is* a real instance of love. In such cases, then, we may have difficulties in identifying not only *whether* we believe the relevant beliefs, but also in deciding *what* those beliefs are. Sometimes we have no direct access to what we need to know and intensity or duration is our only reliable indicator<sup>20</sup> - a point Wittgenstein notes;

“ “If it passes, then it was not true love” Why was it not in that case? Is it our experience, that only this feeling and not that endures?...we test love for its *inner* character, which the immediate feeling does not discover. Still, this picture is important to us. Love, what is important, is not a feeling, but something deeper, which merely manifests itself in the feeling.”<sup>21</sup>

The opaque nature of such emotions makes us particularly vulnerable to the kind of mistaken identity I have been referring to. Another indicator of whether an emotion is a mere facsimile or not may be - as the foregoing remarks might suggest- whether it is pleasureable or painful. David Pugmire<sup>22</sup> offers the example of the “culture of victimhood” in which those who lament their own fate secretly take enjoyment in their role. In such cases - assuming they exist - the fact that someone can experience pleasure suggests that they do not *really* endorse their judgements- do not really believe them. Taking pleasure in negative emotions is, in real-life contexts, an indicator of real ambiguity, and perhaps a lack of complete honesty. But it need not be. As Pugmire also suggests, in a case of real embarrassment, the person is rarely able to make the necessary “switch” in order to see the funny side of their situation. The ability to perform this switch may come with time as the pain of the original emotion fades. But the fading pain need

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<sup>20</sup> A fact which may help to make the Romantic reliance on *intensity* of emotional experience as a criterion of authenticity - discussed in chapter five- more understandable.

<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1, 115. And relatedly, at *Philosophical Investigations* 174e, he asks, “-Why does it sound queer to say, “For a second he felt deep grief”- only because it so seldom happens?”

<sup>22</sup> Pugmire, “Conflicting Emotions and the Indivisible Heart”, *Philosophy* 1996, (p.327)



not always make the emotion any less real or sincerely held. In a case of genuine grief, the fading intensity of the emotion may be a source of anxiety and even guilt to the person concerned, precisely *because* other things - for instance pleasures - are *not* any longer precluded<sup>23</sup>.

While experiences of this sort will not attract reproach, emotional distancing of a kind which may be illustrated by the case of the painter Monet. On seeing his wife on her deathbed his emotional experience was one that we might describe as "aestheticised"-disengaged in some way;

"(Seeing) haunts my days; it is their joy, their torment. To the point that once by the bier of a woman who had been and was still very dear to me, I caught myself, my eyes fixed on her forehead, in the act of composing the scene in a sequence of colours...seeking to make my own the gradation of colour death had just settled upon the immobile face...see to what a pass things had come. The desire was natural enough to reproduce the last likeness of her who was going to leave us forever....my reflexes led me in spite of myself into an unconscious operation which repeated the daily course of my life. So the beast in his treadmill."<sup>24</sup>

What seems to have occurred in Monet's case, similar to the cases above, is that his reaction - his grief- did not *preclude* the taking of such aesthetic pleasure. It is not clear, however, which is cause and which effect- whether it is his focus on the aesthetic features which precludes the grief, or the fact that the grief is *disengaged* which permits the enjoyment of aesthetic features. But his comments suggest that it is the *habitual* perception of things in aesthetic terms that is the problem. Given what we have been saying, it is tempting to conclude that this habitual "aestheticising" of experience is in some way responsible for the absence of real grief- although Monet himself does not explicitly say this.

Monet, however, is at least aware of his situation. But this is not always the case, as we can see from the fictional case of the Duke of Mantua from Verdi's opera *Rigoletto*.<sup>25</sup> The Duke is presented as a libertine who enjoys the seduction of women whose beauty or

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<sup>23</sup> And importantly, in the case of fading grief, the pleasure is not connected to the pain as it is in our experience of tragedy- we do not take pleasure *in* the pain.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Marcia Baron (Op. Cit).

<sup>25</sup> Discussed by Irving Singer, *The Pursuit of Love* (p.47).



charm arouse his sexual appetite. But in the second act he tells the audience that his feelings for Gilda are different from any he has experienced before. He claims that she has elicited in him a true and abiding love which has made him forget his own selfish pleasures. The music which accompanies these declarations is thoroughly convincing; he sounds like a young man enthused by the purity of Romantic love. However, when the courtiers who have abducted Gilda carry her to the duke's bedroom, he rapes her in his usual libertine manner. In the face of this, what are we to make of his declarations of love? One alternative is that the Duke's is a case of self-deception. He knows he is not really in love but conceals this fact from himself. This is of course possible. But must it be the only alternative? More interesting is the possibility that he simply *mistakes* his own emotional state, for the kinds of reasons which were discussed above.

My contention then, is that in view of the kinds of cases discussed in this section, we should accept the possibility that art *may* have harmful emotional effects of the sort described. The basic difficulty is that since emotion does not require sincere judgement or belief, and yet can be *convincing*, we are vulnerable to mistaking the state we are in. Moreover it may lead to a lack of unity or single-mindedness in our perspective. Something of this criticism, can also be found in Plato. Christopher Janaway<sup>26</sup> writes that, in addition to various other criticisms of art, what worried Plato was the idea that through imaginative engagement with imitation, we become a little *like* what is imagined; we become in effect, *multiple*;

“Plato shows that the root of his position is a fear of diversity or plurality within the individual....By the Principle of Assimilation, anyone who imitates many things becomes like each of them, hence becoming, in a sense, a multiple person....the more models he permitted himself to imitate, the less single he would be to his commitment to developing the one character he regarded as his ideal.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Janaway, (Op.Cit.)

<sup>27</sup> In one way, if we take Plato's objection to be simply that people “identify” straightforwardly with characters in works of art, then there seem to be reasons for thinking this is false. Readers/viewers do *not* feel the same things as characters they read about (for reasons considered above) nor are they disposed to *do* the same things. Furthermore, there is little direct evidence that people tend then or later to “act out” what they have seen. As Noel Carroll argues, as readers and viewers we typically do not respond in a Walter Mitty-ish way to what we read or see. Nevertheless, there may be more subtle ways- parallel to the facsimile cases of emotions - in which we do something *like* acting out, even if we are unaware that this is what we are



And if, in addition, the result of this is that we take pleasure in real life situations of suffering for example, this will be an ethically bad result. Art then *can* be bad for our ethical health. But how damning an admission *is* this? In a sense it merely highlights a danger that is ever-present. But it should not blind us to the positive educational functions art may have. Importantly, we have seen no reason to think that the nature of the emotions we experience in response to art works are not the sorts of things to play an educational role with respect to our real-life emotions<sup>28</sup>.

In fiction we have the opportunity to scrutinise our emotions, to sift, discriminate and savour them, in ways we usually do not. Admittedly, this might encourage a habitual attitude of attending to our own emotional states, making *them* the primary focus of our attention. This seems to be the kind of thing which might be a natural consequence of Feagin's account of the Paradox of tragedy. But art *need* not have these effects, and there is no need to suppose that it normally *does*. I conclude then, that the worries with which this chapter began need not lead to the dramatic consequences we have considered. Having dealt with this objection to the idea that art may play a role in emotional education, I turn now to a more general issue. Whether, what and how we can learn from

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doing. For criticism of the "identification" model of reader response, see Noel Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* ch.5

<sup>28</sup> Also of considerable relevance to this point is the question of how we should describe what it is that we do when we - for example- read a novel. Here our inquiry rubs up against another debate- that between "Theory" theorists and "Simulationists". There is a real question whether we should think of folk psychology - our understanding of others' mental states- as a "theory" which we possess and apply. The "Theory" theorists, who endorse this kind of description, also conceive reading a novel as an exercise in theory application. "Simulationists", on the other hand, take the view that both in our everyday capacities to understand others, and in our empathy with fictional characters, we are not applying a *theory*, but rather "simulating" what it is *like* for the other person. The ability to simulate is a brute *imaginative capacity*. On the simulationist view, we can learn things from literature by finding out what it must be *like* to be in a variety of circumstances, to suffer a variety of fates, and so on, through our ability to simulate, to grasp things from an imaginary perspective. Art is then a considerable resource since it educates us in *what things are like* in ways we might have been unaware of. For an example of this kind of account of what we can learn from art see Noel Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* ch.5. For the complicated debate between Theory theorists and Simulationists, see the two collections, *Folk Psychology* and *Mental Simulations*, both edited by M. Davies and T. Stone. Some of the considerations in favour of simulation are mentioned briefly in the next chapter.

art, are questions I now postpone until the second half of the following chapter, where I consider Plato's attack on the arts.

First I propose to return to a general issue which has already been raised. In chapter three I offered a criticism of the Stoic account of emotion which focused on the point that *phantasia* or appearances can be *convincing*, whether or not they are believed. This point was framed within a more general one- that philosophical accounts of our psychology tend to go wrong by assuming that cognitive elements must be characterised as beliefs. This is the more general issue which I discuss in the next chapter, and which will lead us to consider Plato's reasons for denying that the arts are a source of knowledge.



## Chapter Eight; Beyond Belief.

In this chapter, I approach the more general issue of psychological description through a consideration of some of the work of Donald Davidson. In his article "Rational Animals"<sup>1</sup> Davidson argues that animals which are incapable of belief are similarly incapable of rationality. He further argues that creatures which do not possess language are incapable of belief. Consequently, only species which count as language users qualify as rational. Although Davidson concedes that the argument is not quite water-tight, to the extent that it *is* compelling, its force derives from the work done by the notion of belief. In the following, my central aim is to argue that Davidson exaggerates the importance of belief. His paired-down "belief and desire" psychology is too limited, I claim, to do justice to the range of mental phenomena we encounter both in ourselves and in other species, and I shall argue for an expanded taxonomy of the mental. Such a taxonomy is not new; in fact, it was already well developed in the writings of classical authors such as Aristotle and the Stoic Chrysippus<sup>2</sup>.

My second aim is to connect this charge against Davidson's psychology with some difficulties which arise in connection with the emotions. This connection is not however artificial. In the first place, Davidson himself explicitly applies his own account to cover hopes, fears and other emotional states, and has written an article devoted to the nature of one emotion<sup>3</sup> in particular- pride. In addition, the two problems which I will focus on- so-called "arational"<sup>4</sup> actions done in the grip of emotion; and the problem of emotional responses to fiction<sup>5</sup>- are problematic precisely because they are instances of *belief-free*

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<sup>1</sup> "Rational Animals" in *Actions and Events; Essays on Donald Davidson*. Ed. E. LePore.

<sup>2</sup> As we have already seen in chapter four.

<sup>3</sup> This view was considered in chapter one.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in R. Hursthouse. "Arational Actions". *Journal of Philosophy*. 1991, and mentioned in chapter one.

<sup>5</sup> There is now a large literature on this topic, beginning with Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions". *Journal of Philosophy*, 1978 and Colin Radford, "How can we be Moved by the Fate

states. As such, they have been thought to be at best arational, or worse, irrational. Those writers who have subscribed to this conclusion evidently share Davidson's conviction that without belief there can be no rationality<sup>6</sup>. In general, it is a failing of much recent theorising about the emotions that it insists on belief as a component of any emotional state. This has been due, I think, to the same unwillingness to recognise any "cognitive" states other than belief which we can identify in Davidson.

Thirdly, while there is a need for an expanded taxonomy of mental states, and while I think this can be used to combat some of Davidson's arguments, it leaves us with the separate question of whether such states and actions based on them can count as rational. This is true both of animal states and of the problematic emotional states I referred to above. The question of why we call anything rational is the third and last question I address.

I begin by outlining Davidson's argument in the first section. In the second, I introduce the related emotional cases. In the third, I consider how some of Davidson's arguments might be met. In Section four I say a little more about the alternative accounts of the mental lives of animals (and ourselves) found in Aristotle and the Stoics, and in the final section I try to argue that much of what we commend in describing something as rational can be found in (at least) the emotional cases. In this limited way, I try to argue that there can be rationality beyond belief.

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of Anna Karenina?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1975. Recent accounts of the debate can be found in Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 1990, ch.2 and Jerrold Levinson, "Emotion in Response to Art" in Hjort and Laver (eds.) *Emotion and the Arts* 1997. This topic is discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>6</sup> There are two separate, though related questions here; first, what the requirements are for a creature to be rational; secondly, what makes a mental state or an action rational.



## Davidson's Argument.

Davidson begins by citing an example of Norman Malcolm's. A dog is chasing a cat. The cat runs towards an oak tree, but at the last minute swerves and disappears up a nearby maple. The dog misses this and upon reaching the oak it rears up on its hind legs, as if trying to scale it. Observing all this, we say naturally of the dog, "It thinks the cat went up the oak tree."

Davidson asks whether this attribution of belief to the dog can be correct. Certainly there is some behavioural evidence for it, but this is not sufficient. How should we describe what it is that the dog believes, asks Davidson. Does the dog believe that the animal went up *that thing*; or that it went up the tree; or went up the *oak* tree, and so on? Intensionality is a feature of beliefs. There is always a description under which the believer believes. But are any of these descriptions "ones that would suit the dog"?<sup>7</sup> Can the dog believe of an object that it is a tree, for example? Davidson replies,

"This would seem impossible unless we suppose the dog has many general beliefs about trees; that they are growing things, that they need soil and water...there is no fixed list of things someone with the concept of a tree must believe, but without many general beliefs there would be no reason to identify a belief as a belief about a tree...similar considerations apply to the dog's supposed thinking about the cat."

(p.475)

So, according to Davidson, if the dog has beliefs, there will be some correct description of what it believes, and that description will involve concepts. Concepts, in turn require not just one, but many related beliefs. This point about concepts is related to another point Davidson makes use of here and elsewhere<sup>8</sup>- the "holism of the mental". If someone believes that there are a

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<sup>7</sup> Davidson, (op. cit.) p.475.

<sup>8</sup> In "Mental Events", in *Essays on Actions and Events*.

hundred people in the room, then they believe there are more than fifty people in the room. This is a fact that anyone with number concepts would be expected to agree to if asked. Similarly, if you want something yet do nothing to get it, there will have to be some explanation for your inertia, because what it is to want something just is to be motivated to get it in the absence of any countervailing considerations. Akrasia, is for this reason, another of Davidson's worries. Rationality itself is a fundamental constraint on human thought and action. As Davidson sums it up, "Radical incoherence in belief is therefore impossible."<sup>9</sup>

Returning to animals, if we attribute the belief that the cat went up the tree, we should expect to be able to attribute a range of other beliefs to the dog, at the very least, other beliefs about cats and trees. But at some point the evidence for these further attributions will dry up;

"It seems to me that no matter where we start, we very soon come to beliefs such that we have no idea at all how to tell whether a dog has them, and yet such that, without them, our original attribution looks shaky." (p.475)

In addition to this point about the holism of beliefs, Davidson points out that all other propositional attitudes depend on beliefs. If you are *worried* by someone's lateness in arriving, then you believe they are late, if you *pity* someone's misfortune, then you believe them to be suffering misfortune, and so on. Without beliefs such states are incoherent- irrational. In fact we will see that this is exactly the(alleged) problem with emotional responses to fiction. A further consequence of the arguments so far considered,- which Davidson doesn't explicitly indicate- is that they entail that animals do not have emotions; or at least, not like our emotions. This follows simply from the facts that (according to Davidson) they cannot have beliefs and that emotions require beliefs.

Now, on the basis of the arguments already advanced, Davidson argues that the complexity necessary for correct attributions of (complexes of) belief only seems to occur when a creature possesses language. Once he has established the necessary connection between belief and language, we can, he says, be

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<sup>9</sup> "Rational Animals" (p.475).



content to go on attributing beliefs and desires to animals just as we might to thermostats and heat-seeking missiles, in the manner of Dennett's "Intentional Stance", in the knowledge that such attributions are functionally profitable, but strictly inaccurate (p.477/8).

The argument for the necessity of language has two steps. The first step is to argue that in order to have beliefs a creature will require the *concept* of belief. Secondly, it is argued that in order to have the concept of belief the creature will require language (p.748). To argue for the first claim, Davidson focuses on the phenomenon of surprise;

"Suppose I believe there is a coin in my pocket. I empty my pocket and find no coin. I am surprised.... Surprise requires that I be aware of a contrast between what I did believe and what I come to believe. Such awareness, however, is a belief about a belief." (p.479)

This phenomenon of surprise, says Davidson, reveals what is required if a creature is to have the concept of belief. A creature cannot be surprised if all that occurs is that it changes from having the belief that the pocket contains a coin to the belief that it does not. Surprise requires an awareness that the first belief, though sincerely held, was false. This shows that the concept of belief involves the notion of truth. To have a belief is just to think that what is believed is true, and this also amounts to possession of the *concept* of belief.

The second step of the argument- showing that the concept of belief requires language- works by claiming that the contrast between how things seemed and how they were, which is required by the concept of belief, can only be possessed by a creature with the concept of a shared world about which we can say true things. Davidson confesses that although language is *sufficient* for this conception- since it assumes a shared world- he does not know how to show that it is *necessary* for it. This final stage of the argument remains then, he admits, incomplete.

To sum up, Davidson's argument works by setting out the conditions that would have to be satisfied if a creature can be said to have beliefs. If it cannot have beliefs then it cannot be rational. It is clear that Davidson is sceptical of the claim that in Malcolm's example, with which he begins, the dog believes

the cat went up the tree. Since the dog cannot, he claims, have beliefs- although we can go on treating it *as if* it did- it is not rational. The only difference between the dog and the heat seeking missile is a wider range of behaviour (p.476.). Clearly, in this argument everything hinges on the notion of belief. In advance of asking whether the argument is a good one or not, we should at least wonder at the fact that by an *a priori* argument Davidson claims to show that there is no difference between the mental lives of a dog and a missile. This is not his main conclusion of course - *that* is a conclusion about rationality. To the extent that the argument has intuitive appeal, it relies on the idea that rational creatures evaluate their beliefs and try to adopt procedures which make them match up with the way the world is, and that, in a similar way, they act in ways which generally promote their ends. Rationality is opposed, on this picture, to automatism. The main question which we will have to consider, if we find this picture acceptable, is whether a creature requires beliefs to be a part of it. I will now outline the two problematic areas concerning the emotions.



## “Arational actions” and Emotional Responses to Fiction.

The standard model used for explaining action- one which Davidson himself endorses- is the “belief and desire” model. If we ask why someone acted as they did, we will find a pair of mental states (which Davidson calls the “Primary Reason”<sup>10</sup>) which together explain the action. Often, once we find one of this pair, say the desire, it is not necessary to mention the belief also. If I ask you why you went into the next room and I find out you wanted a drink, I normally do not need to ask if you also believed that by going into the next room you could satisfy that desire. Nevertheless, such a pair, however obvious, can always be found. This is the minimum condition upon rational action. If I ask why you drank a can of paint and your answer is just “because it is Tuesday”, your explanation is unintelligible. We may then start to seek for further desires or beliefs which would enable us to understand why you drank the paint. If there are none, we might conclude there is some other type of explanation for what you did- say a pathological one.

Intelligibility, the possibility of “seeing the point” of an action, is what is minimally required for an action to be rational, and this sort of intelligibility is provided by belief and desire explanation. This does not imply that every action which is rational in this sense is rational in a stronger, normative sense. A wife may suspect here husband of infidelity simply because he is whistling and in a good mood. This is intelligible but may be irrational in the stronger sense.

However, there are some actions which appear to fall between these two cases. They are intelligible, in a sense, but no belief/ desire explanation can be found for them. Here are a few examples<sup>11</sup>; after a heated argument with

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<sup>10</sup> In “Actions Reasons and Causes”,(p.1).

<sup>11</sup> The examples are from Hursthouse. (Op.cit.) The present section briefly recaps material originally presented in section nine of chapter one.

someone, I tear up their photograph; frightened by the thought of ghosts or burglars, I hide under the bedclothes; jumping for joy; infuriated by my tin opener, I throw it into the corner; I kick the cupboard door that refuses to shut; talking to a photograph; at a crucial moment in a horror film I cover my eyes, although they are already shut.

The difficulty with these cases and others like them, is in finding a suitable pair of beliefs and desires that will explain the actions even in the *minimal* sense. It may be tempting to assume that if the actions are genuinely intentional that there *must* be some explanation of the required sort. But that is not born out by the facts. Take the case of tearing up a photograph in anger. You might, in doing this, desire to hurt the person in the photograph, and believe that it is a photograph of them. But this is not the required kind of explanation. If the desire is to hurt the person or scratch their face, the connecting belief would have to be something like the belief that the photograph is the person. In searching for an appropriate belief, we are searching for something with which to complete a statement like, "he acted in order to....", or "he was trying to..."<sup>12</sup>. But it quickly becomes clear that there is none available.

Suppose we try saying that the person tore the picture in order to express their emotion<sup>13</sup>. But this suggestion attributes to the person in question a desire to express their emotion and a belief that by acting as they did, they would express it. But is this characteristically what is going on in these cases? It might be if the person was acting on the advice of a psychiatrist who counselled them to express their emotions more openly. This however pictures the agent as *trying* to express their emotions, and hitting upon a way of doing it. But this is not usually the case. Nor is it usually the case that we have a distinct desire of this sort, *apart from* the desire simply to rip up the picture. If it is not plausible that the person ripped the photograph *in order to* express their emotion, is it possible then that they ripped it *as* an expression of the emotion? While true, this new explanation is not really an explanation at all,

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<sup>12</sup> Hursthouse. Op. cit.(p.59).

<sup>13</sup> The suggested explanation, and the argument against it are Hursthouse's.



since it adds nothing to the original description of these cases, that the person acts out of emotion.

The upshot then seems to be that these cases are not rational. Are they then irrational? No; that would be like the wife suspecting adultery- it would embody a *failure* of reason, such as reaching a belief on insufficient grounds or acting so as to frustrate your ends. The point about these cases is that they are not done for reasons at all and so do not constitute failures of rationality. It is better then to class them as arational.

The second kind of case can be stated more concisely. In responding emotionally to the fate of characters in fiction- in novels or on the stage- we do not, at the same time really believe these characters exist. We do not therefore believe that they are suffering, or that they die, succeed or get married. But if we lack these beliefs, how can we have these emotions? Davidson, we have already seen, argues that emotions require beliefs. If I pity someone, I must believe they are suffering. To lack the beliefs and yet have the emotion is a form of irrationality. Davidson is not the only person to take this view, either of what emotions in general require, or of the irrationality of responses to fiction<sup>14</sup>.

It seems we have then two kinds of action or emotion which are not rational, even in the minimal sense. What makes them irrational or arational is the absence of appropriate beliefs, and this is the connection with Davidson's discussion of rationality in part one, to which I now return.

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<sup>14</sup> Radford (op.cit) makes the same claim. A related, though distinct, question (raised by Walton) is whether such emotions are *genuine* emotions, given the absence of belief.

## Criticisms of Davidson's Argument.

"Does the dog think the cat went up the tree?" That was the question Davidson started with. Is that the same question as "Does the dog *believe* the cat went up the tree?" Davidson introduces Malcolm's example as an attempt to give an affirmative answer to the first question, but discusses it as if it was giving an answer to the second. As Davidson says (eg. p. 475) all propositional attitudes are thoughts. But are all thoughts propositional attitudes?

Davidson doesn't show any explicit interest in this question, and presumably the reason for this is that he accepts the following two claims. First, if the dog *thinks* the cat went up the tree then it has *propositional* thoughts. Secondly, if the dog has propositional thoughts, it must have concepts (this was the point of asking whether a cat believes something is a tree. Having beliefs involves concepts, so it involves many other beliefs). So, even if we shift from beliefs to thoughts, Davidson might say, we can't avoid attributing propositions and concepts (or equally, that to attribute these is already to come very close to attributing beliefs). But without these, the dog can't think the cat went up the tree. And neither of these attributions is plausible, according to Davidson.

As a means of considering Davidson's argument, I will focus on the following three questions; (a) Can an animal have perceptual experiences with intentional content without having beliefs? The point of this question is to see whether, for example, the dog could *see that* the cat went up the tree without believing it, where perceptual experience is a kind of thought with intentional content. (b) Can an animal have perceptual experience with intentional content without having concepts? (c) Could an animal which had experiences with intentional content, but which lacked beliefs and concepts, be rational?



First of all then, what is the relationship between belief and perception? The idea that perception and perceptual content is simply a matter of belief and the content of belief would be a mistake. Some philosophers<sup>15</sup> have argued that perceptual content can be reduced to belief, but there are serious objections to such a view. For example when I look at the Muller-Lyer illusion, what I see are two lines of apparently different length. This remains the perceptual content of my experience even if I *believe* that the two lines are in fact the same in length. Since the content of my belief is not the same as the content of my perception, belief and perceptual content are not the same thing. Aristotle made the same point when he argued that the perceived diameter of the sun is a foot across, but I do not *believe* that the diameter of the sun is a foot across<sup>16</sup>. Again, since I have no belief corresponding to the content of the experience, perceptual content is not a matter of belief. It is also obvious that my perceptual experience can have intentional content without my explicitly expressing it (to myself, for example, in my head) in propositional form in natural language. When I swerve to avoid an oncoming car, my perceptual experience has definite content, even though I do not stop to formulate it explicitly.

These points seem sufficient to answer our first question; I can have perceptual content even though I have no corresponding beliefs. Why then could an animal not have perceptual experiences even though it lacks belief? One reason Davidson mentions is that beliefs involve *concepts* - which brings us to my second question. Can an animal have experiences with intentional content without having concepts? Can, as Davidson puts it, the dog think that the cat ran up the tree? Can it even think that something *is* a tree? This is a tricky question to answer, not primarily because of the nature of animal thought, but because there is no agreement among philosophers about what it is to have concepts.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, D.M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. Criticism of this view is contained in Fred Dretske, "Sensation and Perception" in Dancy (ed.) *Perceptual Knowledge*.

<sup>16</sup> *De Anima* 3.3 (428b)

Davidson argues that to have the concept "tree" is to have a *range* of beliefs about trees. In one way this is right enough. To have full mastery of many concepts requires such complexes of beliefs. An example of this would be mastery of our range of concepts for family relationships; "uncle", "grandmother", "nephew", "brother-in law", etc. Children often struggle to grasp the full implications of these concepts, and typically find it difficult to grasp converse relations; that if Jane is Bob's aunt, then Bob is Jane's nephew, and so on. In fact these concepts are all interconnected, so that to have full mastery of some is to have mastery of many. But even for those accomplished in the use of these concepts, some relations still take strenuous "working out". So for this and other sorts of case, Davidson has a point. But are *all* concepts like this? Why could an animal not have something that amounted to a concept- that served as a "marker" of some kind, and as a means of discrimination- without it being richly interwoven with a range of other concepts.

This explicitly raises the issue of what it is to have a concept. Consider someone looking at a mountain-side<sup>17</sup>. They may notice and appreciate its irregular contour. But it would seem that such a person can notice the irregularity without having a *concept* which matches it. He may have the concept "irregularity", but that is too general to account for the content of the perceptual experience. Does this count as a concept? One reason for thinking it does not, would be if *recognition* is held to be a necessary condition of concept-possession; this case may fail to satisfy that requirement since the spectator may later be unable to distinguish that very mountainside again from others.

Another kind of case is that of facial recognition. When we "learn" a face we can often recognise it from different distances, at different angles, through time and slightly altered, we can recognise it from portions of it, and we can identify caricatures of it. This range of judgmental capacities looks not unlike what is involved in the grasp of a concept - and would satisfy the recognition requirement that the subject be able to *re-identify*. Should we then allow that

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<sup>17</sup> The example is taken from Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*.



this grasp of a face is a concept? If we do, we seem to have an argument against Davidson, since it is not a richly interwoven concept. If we do not, it is also an argument against Davidson, since if my perceptual experience can feature a face, why not a tree?

Admittedly, "tree" is a universal and can be extended to other instances, but the face example has something of this too, albeit within a more limited range. The same kind of argument can be given for colours. Think of all the shades of red that there are. We do not have linguistic concepts for them all. Yet I can identify and discriminate amongst them, and even, with a good memory re-identify them. Here too we can either say that such recognitional and discriminatory capacities are *not* conceptual<sup>18</sup> - and so intentional content is not exhaustively conceptual - or we can say that it *is* conceptual, but the concepts are not linguistic ones, but ones that can be derived from experience.

One more example. Take the concept "Dahlia"<sup>19</sup>. No doubt this is a rich concept of the sort Davidson has in mind, and full grasp of it will involve a range of beliefs about the origins, nature and treatment of dahlias. However, if two people look at a dahlia, and one of them has full mastery of the concept while the other lacks it, is their perceptual experience different? If the claim that the intentional content of experience is exhaustively conceptual were true, it should be. But the person who lacks the concept will successfully discriminate between dahlias and other flowers (within limits, perhaps. But dahlias, unlike aunts and uncles, can be picked out in perception without complex criteria). But more importantly, it seems plausible to say that his (intentional) perceptual experience of the flower is unaffected by the absence or acquisition of the concept. This is not to deny that if you *do* acquire the full concept you will be able to make discriminations that you could not before. Rather the point is that you can make some discriminations without it. To sum up these considerations about concepts, we can say, with regard to animals, either that there can be intentional perceptual content which is not

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<sup>18</sup> This is the option taken by Michael Tye in *Ten problems of Consciousness*.

<sup>19</sup> The example is taken from Allan Millar, "What's in a look", *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society 1985*.

conceptual, or we can claim that this content is conceptual, or proto-conceptual, but not like the complex concepts requiring beliefs that we have. If this is correct, then we can see how the dog might see/think that the cat went up the tree without having (our) concepts such as tree and cat.

If it is correct that the dog could have this thought, but not have our concepts, how would this differ from *believing* that the cat went up the tree, and would the difference mean that the dog could not be rational?

One difference would be the one Davidson mentions, that the belief would be systematically connected with other propositions. We have admitted that the weaker dog-thought would not possess this feature. However, other differences suggest themselves. Might the dog not also lack any distinction between how things *seem* and how they *are*, as Davidson's remarks suggest? Would the dog not merely take things at face value, always automatically accepting appearances, unable to evaluate them? And would the lack of belief not also make the dog incapable of inference-making, which is an important feature of rationality. I think, however, there is reason to deny these implications, and in order to say why, I shall now turn to the accounts of the mental lives of animals offered by the Stoics and Aristotle.



## Aristotle and the Stoics.

Both Aristotle and the main Stoic writers such as Chrysippus, Zeno, Posidonius and Seneca, would have agreed with Davidson that animals are not rational. However, in denying them rational belief, they expanded the account of the perceptual experience of animals in order to explain their capacities<sup>20</sup>.

Aristotle argues (*De Anima* 2.6) that qualities are perceived by animals as belonging to objects. So an animal sees a black cat, a white ball, and so on<sup>21</sup>. The animal does not merely have the perceptual experience of whiteness, but of whiteness belonging to something or located somewhere. Aristotle is prepared to allow, unlike Davidson, that the dog can see the cat run up the tree. In addition, if we return for a moment to the Muller-Lyer illusion, we saw there a need to distinguish the appearance of things in perception, and beliefs about them. Aristotle employs the Greek term "*phantasia*" to refer to the appearance, in contrast to "*doxa*", or beliefs. The appearance of the sun then, is that it is twelve inches across, but this is not what we believe.

Aristotle also associates a further feature- conviction ("*pistis*") with belief<sup>22</sup>. When we believe something we are convinced by it, and this involves being persuaded (or succeeding in self-persuasion). Persuasion, furthermore, is a rational matter. The situation is different with mere appearances. Human thinking often requires *phantasia*, but in addition it possesses a further layer of persuasion and conviction. Appearance (*phantasia*) alone does not involve this element and so lacks conviction (*pistis*). This reflective level is the level of

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<sup>20</sup> This section recaps some of the points presented in chapter four, concerning Stoic views of the emotions.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Sorabji, in his discussion of Aristotle calls this predicational perception, in order to distinguish it from propositional perception (seeing *that*...) which might be reserved for perception involving concepts. Cf. *Animal Minds*, p.17)

<sup>22</sup> *De Anima* 3.3. (428b 3-10). Aristotle's use of the notion is discussed in Sorabji, op.cit. ch.3

belief. It is similar to Davidson's claim that humans have beliefs about beliefs. Aristotle claims that animals lack this kind of conviction. And consequently, just as they cannot be convinced, they cannot be unconvinced either.

This point is also made, although in a slightly different way, by the Stoics. For them, perception is not merely an appearance, but an *assent* to an appearance. Animals possess the appearances but not the ability to assent or withhold assent; they accept automatically the way things seem. Should we accept these claims about animal conviction and assent? Here empirical evidence is called for, and it surely seems as if animals *are* capable of this kind of withholding assent. How safe would the blind man be if his guide dog could not withhold assent from the command to cross the busy road;<sup>23</sup> or alternatively, what is going on when the mouse hesitates to take the cheese from the mousetrap, and learns not to: or the gorillas who withhold assent from the warning calls of other gorillas who have cried "wolf" too often? In addition, ethologists have argued that some animals are capable of having beliefs about beliefs (for example, beliefs about the beliefs of other animals).

A second subject which we have already mentioned is emotion. Aristotle denies beliefs to animals, yet acknowledges that they have emotions. He insists that the emotion must have intentional content (or cognitive content), but thinks it can have this without beliefs. Again he employs *phantasia* to provide intentional content distinct from belief. This analysis is consistent with some modern accounts which wish to avoid the difficulties inherent in belief-models of emotion.<sup>24</sup> Emotion, on such an account is a matter of the situation appearing a certain way to the observer. This does not mean that animal emotions are the same as human emotions. They may be similar through a certain range. But many of our emotions- such as pride, guilt, remorse and so on- involve evaluations and concepts of the self. So it is a

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<sup>23</sup> The examples are Richard Sorabji's, *op.cit.*

<sup>24</sup> For example; Robert.C. Roberts, "What an Emotion is", *Philosophical Review* 1988; C.Calhoun, "Cognitive Emotions?" in Calhoun and Solomon (eds.) *What is an Emotion?*; P.Greenspan, *Emotion and Reasons*; D.Hamlyn, "The Phenomena of Love and Hate", in *Perception, Learning and the Self*; Noel Carroll, *op. cit.*



further question whether animals have these emotions.<sup>25</sup> The Stoics, in general taking the view that emotion requires assent and judgement, deny that animals have emotion. But two other points made by the Stoics are more interesting. First, Chrysippus notes that beliefs can outlive emotion<sup>26</sup>. To find a joke funny, for example, cannot simply be to *believe* that it is funny, since that belief remains, even when, through time, you no longer find the joke funny. To explain this, he introduces the terms “freshness”, to cover what it is that fades<sup>27</sup>. This freshness has intentional content. This thought can be seen as a precursor of the modern claim that aesthetic experience is not a matter of belief;

“It is of importance to note first, that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to see the grace or unity of a work, hear the plaintiveness or frenzy of the music, notice the gaudiness of a colour scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone.”<sup>28</sup>

It is not, in other words, sufficient for the appreciation of a work that you have a complex of appropriate and even true beliefs about it. This is, I think, directly analogous to the point that belief is insufficient for having emotional experience. In both cases the reason is quite simple; it is that description in terms of belief is not the correct description for the *content* of these states, just as it is not the correct description of perceptual content generally.

The second and related point is made by Posidonius<sup>29</sup>; that merely believing something is the case, believing that someone is suffering is usually not

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<sup>25</sup> In his book *Dogs Never Lie About Love*, Jeffrey Masson claims that dogs feel the full range of emotions, including pity, love and forgiveness.

<sup>26</sup> Textual evidence can be found in Long and Sedley *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (sec.65).

<sup>27</sup> The application of “freshness” to the case of humour is taken from Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (p.111). Although it is the *belief* which Chrysippus claimed to be fresh, I suggest that we can think of freshness as being part of the cognitive content of the state, apart from belief.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic”, quoted in Derek Matravers, *Art and Emotion*.

<sup>29</sup> See Long and Sedley, op. cit. sec. 65, and Sorabji, (p.57).

sufficient to arouse an emotion such as pity. Something else is required. I will return to these two points below.

Although Aristotle and the Stoics want to withhold reason from animals, they augment their perceptual content, by allowing *phantasia* to have predicational content. This is enough of a rival account to be set against Davidson's, and in view of the empirical evidence, Davidson's view is not the obvious winner. I will now try to draw together what I have said about animal rationality, and the two earlier problems about emotion.

## A Common Problem- Belief.

To recap; the deficiency in the mental lives of animals according to Davidson is that they lack belief. Similarly, the problem about "Arational" actions and emotional responses to fiction- again, on Davidson's account- is that they are not underpinned by belief. The question now is, does this matter; and does it matter as much as Davidson claims?

The essential question is; what is it we are commending in calling a creature or a belief/action *rational*? We have already looked at some answers to this question. One is that rationality involves evaluation; it involves not merely accepting appearances automatically, or acting automatically. We have also seen some reason to think that animals have this capacity without having beliefs. More ambitiously, rationality may be taken to involve networks of beliefs bound together by concepts and inferences. Again, we have seen some reason not to insist on this; animals can have thoughts and perhaps concepts, can evaluate thoughts and avoid automatism without these advanced capacities. Animals, unlike us, cannot perhaps do logic and mathematics or construct and evaluate explicit syllogisms, but why should we pin rationality on such refined abilities? Especially when much of our own



inferential thought - for example in the realm of practical reasoning- does not involve *explicit* inference-making. A practical syllogism can be constructed *afterwards*, but nobody claims that that we actually go through the steps at the time. Often then, *we* don't deliberate either.

Another key feature of belief is that it is related to truth. Davidson makes this point by claiming that belief provides believers with a *distinction* between how things seem and how they are. But there is no a priori argument to show that non-believers cannot have that distinction. In addition, the empirical evidence mentioned above suggests that some of them *do* have it.

The connection with truth is one of two main ways in which belief is connected with rationality. The second, is in practical reasoning. If I am a believer then I can have good reason to think that the action I undertake will satisfy my goals and desires and promote what I value. So just as the aim of rationality in relation to thought about how things are is truth, the aim of rationality in the sphere of action is *success* of a certain sort (at least, as far as means/end reasoning is concerned. It is another question whether ends themselves can be rational).

Turning back to the two kinds of problem associated with emotions, both of which lack appropriate beliefs, one notable fact about them is that neither of them is obviously concerned *either* with satisfying ends or with finding out how the world is. Emotional responses to fiction do not suppose anything about what is the case- that is precisely the problem with them. "Arational" actions are not attempts to further some goal. This is then one way of seeing what is meant by saying that these actions and emotions are not rational.

However, should we then say that such responses are misguided in some way, or that they are merely automatic? I don't think so. People who respond in these ways can, I suppose, withhold the response if required. Furthermore, in both cases there is a *normative* feature, such as that the response is appropriate or fitting. Someone who is saddened by the fate of Anna Karenina or enjoys the adventures of Huckleberry Finn, will think their emotional responses appropriate to their objects, despite the absence of appropriate existential beliefs. The same can be said for arational actions; in some sense

they too are appropriate to the circumstances. In general, appropriateness in these contexts embodies the evaluative feature of rationality that Davidson prizes, but without a basis in belief. Perhaps these cases fall not into either the sphere of theoretical reasoning or practical reasoning, but into the sphere of the *aesthetic*<sup>30</sup>. This might allow us to see why such cases do not involve belief, although they may still possess the features we value in rationality.

To pick up to the two points made at the end of the last section, aesthetic experience generally involves notions of what is fitting and appropriate (as does the ethical). In these cases, the sense of what is appropriate can only be located within the aesthetic experience itself, and is not a feature of *beliefs* about aesthetic works (Sibley's point, in the previous section). Which brings me to my last point, concerning *phantasia*. Posidonius remarked that beliefs alone are insufficient to produce emotions. Many people are, for example, unmoved by (their own) beliefs about tragedies and the misfortunes suffered by others, but *are* moved by visual images of these people. This suggests that the *phantasia* may perform something like the function of convincing or persuading that Aristotle thought of in connection with belief. This suggestion may seem mistaken, however, since we might think that any *phantasia* will convince, providing it in some sense has the relevant content. But if we turn to aesthetic experience, we find that this is not so. Differences between media, for instance, can be sufficient to produce different degrees of conviction. Reading a horror novel may not have the same effect on me as watching a horror film; the film may produce a much more intense emotional effect. Similarly, phobics may respond to some visual images of the feared objects but not others<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> To use in a rough way Kant's threefold classification of human understanding.

<sup>31</sup> For example, a photograph may produce the same effect as a television image, while a crude pencil drawing may not. The cruder the image, the closer the phobic's state approximates to the mere *belief* that the image depicts the feared object. This is the argument against Levinson's view, referred to in chapter seven, that belief, at least in its *existential* form, is a necessary condition of emotions. The present objection shows Levinson to be mistaken in this, I think.



This point bears directly on the paradox of fiction. Jerrold Levinson<sup>32</sup> argues that the paradox of emotional responses to fiction cannot be mitigated by introducing the example of phobias as instances of emotional states which also lack beliefs;

“With phobic fear we can say that although the subject doesn’t believe the animal in question is dangerous, the subject at least *views* the animal as dangerous, all the while clearly believing that the animal exists”.

(P.33 n.11.)

And again,

“..it seems that such emotions[in response to fictions] must still involve existential beliefs in regard to those objects, or something very close to that—that is, attitudes or stances on the order of taking to exist, or regarding as existent. Otherwise, the state attributed becomes unintelligible...” (p.25.)

So, according to Levinson, in cases of phobia, (unlike cases of responses to fiction) there is always an *existential* belief about the object of the fear, even if the belief that the fear itself is *appropriate* is lacking. But is this so? Phobics may respond to television images or pictures or drawings, just as much as real entities, and in these cases there is no existential belief. Should we say in these cases that phobic fear is not *real* fear, just as it is suggested that emotional responses to fiction are not *real* emotions?

This point seems to make room, then, for what Aristotle seemed to deny, that phantasia can be convincing or unconvincing; some kinds of appearances will produce fear in the phobic, and others won’t. This difference cannot be explained either in terms of the *representational* content of the appearance (since that may be shared) or in terms of beliefs the subjects have about the appearances. This point is I think left out of contemporary discussions of the paradox of fiction, although a recognition of it hovers implicitly in the

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<sup>32</sup> Levinson, op.cit.

background of the following quotation from Derek Matravers<sup>33</sup>. In discussing Walton's account of fearing fictions, Matravers argues that someone watching a horror film does not *believe* that they are threatened, but he is forced to acknowledge that in some sense the spectator comes to lack a *conviction* that what he is seeing is not real;

“Charles [is] on the edge of his seat...his confidence that he is seeing a report is thrown into a maelstrom...he is forced to review all the things he believes to be true- such as, for example, that because this is a report, the slime cannot be trying to get him...Within the fiction, it is not true that the slime can get him, but it is true that the behaviour of the slime undermines his confidence that he is safe in a particularly vivid fashion.”<sup>34</sup>

So Charles does not abandon his *beliefs* in the non-existence of what he is watching, nor in the absence of a real threat, yet his “*conviction*” is shaken. But if conviction is not *belief*, what is it? In fact it is quite clear that belief and conviction are not the same; a schoolboy in the heat of an examination may believe the battle of Hastings to have taken place at the correct date, but through nerves, not be convinced by his belief. In Walton's example, Charles' conviction is undermined by the quality of the visual representation which is particularly “life-like”<sup>35</sup>. There is in principle a wide range of features of aesthetic and perceptual experience which could be relevant to whether the experience is *convincing* in this way or not.<sup>36</sup> If this is correct, then Aristotle was incorrect to argue that *phantasia* is unconnected with persuasion.

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<sup>33</sup> That belief is not necessary for emotion is explicitly recognised in Morreall, “Fear Without belief”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1993, and Carrol, *The Philosophy of Horror*, ch.2.

<sup>34</sup> Matravers, “The Paradox of Fiction” in Hjort and Laver, (op.cit.), and also in *Art and Emotion*.

<sup>35</sup> Although it would be wrong to suggest that *realism* is the only property relevant to making a *phantasia* convincing. Some drawings may be more frightening than the real thing.

<sup>36</sup> In short then; in the schoolboy example, belief is not sufficient for conviction. Similarly, belief is not sufficient for an emotion. In Walton's cinema example, and cases of phobia,



It is important to emphasise that this point does not apply merely to fictional contexts. A smoker may not be persuaded to give up by reading lists of statistics relating smoking and disease, while in contrast, witnessing the dissection of a smoker's lungs may have the desired effect. Once we notice this fact, it becomes clear that imagination is a more crucial feature of emotional experience than belief. Simply by imagining a dangerous situation, or a disgusting action, I can produce the relevant emotional responses. And in these cases, it is also true that to see, for example, a television image of the same situation may produce a more intense response than can be achieved by the unaided imagination. But again, this difference has nothing necessarily to do with the introduction of a belief.

With respect to the fictional cases, however, a work's failure to produce emotional responses in the viewer/reader is more likely to result from a failure on the writer/director's part to successfully construct the fiction in such a way that the viewer/reader is engaged and *cares* about the fate of the characters, than it is to be caused by an absence of belief.<sup>37</sup> Much of our imaginative engagement with fiction should then be explained- as we might expect- by features of the work other than its belief-inducing ones.

One final point is worth making in connection with another opposition which attracted considerable attention in ancient times; the distinction between reason and rhetoric (considered below). The function of the former is to produce true beliefs (by the correct means). The latter is accused by Plato of working by devious means and circumventing reason by appeal to low emotion. The details of this claim would have to be argued, but we may make one general point on the basis of what has been said above. Since the function of art is not merely the production of true beliefs (this is Sibley's point), it might be argued that the same is true of rhetoric. That both these forms appeal often to the emotions and produce states which embody cognitive

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something is at stake which is not belief, which I am calling "conviction". Problems of the same kind were considered briefly at the end of chapter four. I return to the idea that *phantasia* can be convincing later in the chapter.

<sup>37</sup> The point is made by Carroll, (op. cit.), ch.2.

elements as well as affective, need not count against them unless you are already wedded to an account of emotion as pernicious or cognitively empty. If emotions involve *phantasia*, then art forms which produce emotional responses may be said to produce kinds of cognitive experiences quite distinct from belief<sup>38</sup>. This would allow us to see how rhetoric and art might make important contributions to our cognitive lives in ways that batteries of syllogisms might not be capable of. This is not to downgrade argument, but to suggest that argument alone may not be enough, as Aristotle claims (in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) for correct perception and understanding.

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<sup>38</sup> And consequently, we should expect good rhetoric to engage us through convincing *phantasia*, in the same way as good fiction engages us. The relevant features, just as in the case of fictions will not be the work's belief-inducing properties.



## Meaning and World.

Before passing on to the topic of rhetoric, there is another, more general point to be made concerning the role of belief. This point can again be conveniently made through a consideration of Davidson's writings- this time his theory of meaning.<sup>39</sup>The point I will try to make is this; paradoxically, Davidson does not offer an account of the *experience* of meaning at all. Indeed, he does not set out to do so. However, the account of meaning he does offer suggests a picture of the experience of understanding which is starkly at odds with the one we should naturally give of it. *That* account takes us back to Wittgenstein's description of aspect perception (chapter three) as picture of what understanding involves.

We can then construct a parallel opposition to that between belief and *phantasia* ; that between *experiencing* meaning (understood as aspect-perception) and *interpretation* (Davidson's account). The oppositions are closely parallel since in both cases we have something whose content is not reducible to beliefs, but is tied to *experience*. One way of putting this general conclusion is to say that *phantasia*, aspect perception and the experience of meaning all have a *phenomenology*. In contemporary analytic philosophy, much of the discussion of the related topics of perception, meaning and emotion, is dogged by assumptions which can be traced to the central role granted to belief. Accounts of perception such as Armstrong's; theories of emotion which see the cognitive element as belief; and accounts of meaning and understanding such as Davidson's all go wrong by exaggerating the role of belief. In contrast with such accounts I will end by briefly trying to locate these issues in a different tradition, that of phenomenology.

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<sup>39</sup> References are to *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.

## Davidson on Meaning.

“Kurt utters the words “Es Regnet” and under the right conditions we know that it is raining. Having identified his utterance as intentional and linguistic, we are able to go on to interpret his words; we can say what his words, on that occasion, meant. What could we know that would enable us to do this?” (ITI, p.125.)

Davidson’s task is to provide an account of what understanding linguistic utterances involves. But he does not see this as an empirical enquiry. Rather, it involves theoretical speculation about what understanding must involve;

“Claims about what would constitute a satisfactory theory of interpretation are not.... claims about the propositional knowledge of an interpreter, nor are they claims about the details of the inner workings of some part of the brain. They are rather claims about what must be said to give a satisfactory description of the competence of the interpreter. We cannot describe what an interpreter can do except by appeal to a theory of a certain sort.”<sup>40</sup>

One of the mysteries of linguistic comprehension Davidson (amongst others) thinks must be explained is our ability to comprehend novel sentences.

According to Davidson, we can solve this mystery only if we assume that the meaning of sentences depends upon the meanings of sub-sentential components. A language can then be described as a recursive structure (in the manner of Tarski’s theory of truth) composed of a “vocabulary” (sub-sentential components) plus a body of rules governing composition.

The meaning of a sentence, says Davidson, can in one way be given by stating its truth conditions (though he does not equate meaning and truth-

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<sup>40</sup> “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”. In LePore (ed.) *Truth and Interpretation*.



conditions). Therefore the meaning of a sentence can be *analysed* as being composed of elements from the “vocabulary” in truth-relevant ways, and the first-order predicate calculus will enable us to describe the modes of composition.

Anyone in possession of such a recursive structure, claims Davidson, possesses a theory which should enable them to make hypotheses about speaker’s meaning. The Radical Interpreter then tries to confirm these hypotheses using non-linguistic evidence;

“First we look for the best way to fit our logic onto the new language; this may mean reading the logical structure of first-order quantification theory...into the language...treating this much of logic as a grid to be fitted onto the language in one fell swoop...”(ITI, p.136.)

and,

“...the evidence must be of a sort that would be available to someone who does not already know how to interpret utterances the theory is designed to cover; it must be evidence that can be stated without essential use of such linguistic concepts as meaning, interpretation, synonymy and the like”. (ITI, p.128.)

At the level of a single utterance, the evidence that an individual sentence should be linked to a given set of truth conditions is quite slim. Davidson claims, therefore, that it is the *totality* of T-sentences that should fit the evidence about sentences believed by native speakers. This is the tendency towards holism in Davidson that we have already noted. The theory which the interpreter possesses reveals the interconnections between the meanings of different sentences; it does not alter the conditions under which a sentence is true. Further, since the interpretation of meaning involves the ascription of beliefs to speakers and since beliefs can only be ascribed as whole patterns of belief, holism is the result of such ascriptions also<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> This is a convenient place to note the connection between Davidson’s theory of interpretation and the debate between “Theory” theorists and “Simulationists”, mentioned in the previous chapter. Davidson’s view is that when we ascribe beliefs, hopes and desires, these imputed entities are merely theoretical constructions. In other words, he is not a *realist*

Taking this brief summary of Davidson's view as our basis, there are some questions we can raise about it. First, Davidson uses "interpretation" and "understanding" interchangeably;

"What is essential to my argument is the idea of an interpreter, someone who understands the utterances of another" (ITI, p.157.)

But interpretation is concerned with a movement from one medium or language into another. And in this way it is natural to suppose there will be rules of some sort governing this translation. To make the picture of linguistic comprehension as interpretation seem plausible, Davidson concentrates on examples from foreign languages (as in the opening example). But Davidson insists the idea of interpretation also describes cases of local understanding, within the *same* language. (ITI, p.125.) But how plausible is this? As Ian Hacking<sup>42</sup> notes, the suggestion seems unconvincing since it requires us, every time we enter into conversation with another English speaker, to hold before us the possibility that he is an alien. There may be cases where what someone says makes no sense and in which I then actively engage in interpretative strategies. But this kind of understanding is not typical of someone listening to a stream of conversation.

It has been suggested by several writers<sup>43</sup> that the assumption underlying Davidson's account of interpretation, and one that explains his illicit

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about mental phenomena. (On this point see John Heil's discussion of Davidson in Heil, *The Philosophy of Mind*). This relates directly to "Theory" theory. If folk psychology really *is* a theory, then, like all theories it can be disproven, supplanted and replaced. But this implies a lack of commitment to realism about the mental. Davidson is therefore a "Theory" theorist. Those inclined to realism about the mental will be correspondingly ill-disposed towards "Theory" theory. A further difficulty with "Theory" theory follows from the fact that it construes our capacity to ascribe states to others as the result of a process of *inference*. The difficulty is that the "Theory" theorist seems forced to offer a similar account of how we know our *own* mental states. But this - for reasons discussed above and in chapter one - seems straightforwardly false. We do not, in general, *infer* the identity of our mental states. Here we see a further instance of the *inference* model that has recurred at various points in different chapters.

<sup>42</sup> In "A Parody of Conversation". In LePore. Op.cit

<sup>43</sup> By Stephen Mulhall, in *On Being in the World*; and John McDowell, *Mind and World*.



extension of the notion of interpretation to normal contexts, is that all we really hear are “bare” sounds. Davidson himself explicitly suggests this;

“The only candidate for recurrence we have is the interpretation of sound-patterns; speaker and hearer must repeatedly, intentionally and with mutual agreement, interpret relevantly similar sound-patterns of the speaker in the same way” (ITI, p.227.)

This assumption, that the world we perceive is devoid of meaning, seems to reveal an implicit commitment to what Davidson himself (ironically) elsewhere describes as the “Third Dogma” of empiricism. (ITI, p.189). The idea that bare sounds are the basis for understanding is analogous to the theories of perception attacked by Wittgenstein in his account of aspect perception; both assume that our everyday experience of the world is best thought of as a theoretical *construction* out of brute data- the “Given”.

Wittgenstein’s target then, proves not merely to be a straw man, but embodies the assumptions which lie behind one of the dominant research programmes in current philosophy of language.

If Davidson’s view of understanding is not acceptable, what kind of account would be? Whatever the truth about underlying “theories” or grammars a speaker might be said to implicitly possess, understanding has a phenomenology, and any account of understanding must respect that phenomenology. The same is true, we saw in chapter three, for perception. Whether or not there is some processing system which explains perception at some level, what is left over is the content of perceptual *experience*.

In the previous section I considered perception and emotional content, and argued that neither can be reduced to belief. The same is true of linguistic understanding. The phenomenology of understanding is compatible with, and usually *generates*, beliefs; but belief alone is compatible with the phenomenology-free linguistic experience of the radical interpreter. If these claims are right, what do they show? Apart from illustrating the charge of systematic bias in favour of belief on the part of many analytic philosophers, they may make us pause and consider whether an alternative approach to these kinds of understanding might not be more profitable. Certainly, this is

what has been attempted in the Phenomenological tradition. Heidegger offers an account which captures many of the features we have so far wanted to include in our account of perception, linguistic understanding and emotion.

## **Phenomenology, Cognitivism and The Will.**

In this section I briefly consider the account philosophers in the phenomenological tradition -specifically Heidegger and Sartre- have given of emotion. This will serve to bring out the points made in the previous section, and will allow me to raise again an issue which I brought up in the first two chapters- namely cognitivism. In addition, it will return us to the issue of *subjectivity* raised in chapter five, in connection with Kant and the Romantics.

The most important factor common to both Heidegger's and Sartre's account of emotional states is their emphasis on phenomenology. Both philosophers conceive emotions as ways of seeing the world; as states through which the world is revealed as being a certain way. This way of putting it- that it is the *world* that is revealed, or some feature of it- will then provide the connection with cognitivism about value.

One view of emotional states might be that they reveal nothing more than a subjective attitude of the subject whose states they are; that *they* are frightened or angered, say, by whatever the object of their emotion is. But such states reveal nothing about the world. One kind of assumption which might encourage such an account is the empiricist construal of "the world". Being "frightening" or "unjust", it might be claimed, are not properties of *anything* in the world. If "the world" is as empiricists claim, then it is essentially devoid of meaning, and any meaning we claim to locate in it must



be *projected* onto it. And this would be as true for semantic meaning as it is for value.

Related to this account of what the world *really* contains, is a story about our experience *of* the world. As we saw in the account of perception offered by Wittgenstein's imaginary interlocutor in the discussions of aspect-perception, and as we have also seen in Davidson's account of meaning, what the empiricist claims we have experience *of* are simply the empirical properties of entities in the world. And he is then left having to explain anything else as a projection onto those more basic features. However, the preceding section offered reasons for rejecting such an account of our experience. To this extent then the empiricist ontology constrains his limited phenomenology. But this is not always so. Famously, empiricists like Locke<sup>44</sup> have allowed that we *can* have experiences whose phenomenology attributes properties experienced *to* entities in the world, even when there really are no such properties. The most obvious instance of this is the case of secondary properties. Colour, for example, is perceived as belonging to objects in the world, yet Locke argues that such properties are, in an important sense, subjective. There are not *really* (independently of our experience of them) any such properties in the world<sup>45</sup>.

This granted, we could then expect some supplementary explanation for this "error". Why does it seem to us that the world *does* contain such properties? Fortunately, in the case of secondary properties, there is a plausible causal explanation available. The moral of this is simply that

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<sup>44</sup> *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk.2.

<sup>45</sup> Colin McGinn describes what he terms the "Janus-faced" nature of experience in the following way; "...subjective aspects of experience involve a reference to the subject undergoing the experience- this is what their *subjectivity* consists in. But we can also say that perceptual experiences have a world-directed aspect: they present the world in a certain way, say as containing a scarlet sphere against a blue background. This is their representational content, what states of affairs they are *as of*. Thus perceptual experiences are Janus-faced: they point outward to the external world but they also present a subjective face to their subject; they are of something other than the subject and they are like something for the subject." ("Consciousness and Content", in *The Problem of Consciousness* p.29.)

phenomenology, though no guarantor of truth, creates the demand for explanation when it is claimed to be in error. I return to this point below. To bring out the relevance of the point just made, and its connection with the empiricist construal of emotions as projections, suggested above, I will contrast the empiricist view of emotions with Heidegger's.

Heidegger rejects the empiricist account of emotions. In his view emotions *do* reveal something about the world;

“A mood is not related to the psychological....and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on things and persons.... It comes neither from “outside” nor from “inside”, but arises out of Being-in -the World, as a way of such being.”<sup>46</sup>

Here Heidegger begins by rejecting the idea that emotions involve merely projections onto the world from an inner psychological state. But he also claims that it is not merely a question of the world possessing certain features either. In the case of fear, for example, (on which he concentrates) we perceive the *object* of our state as fearful. But the object only has this feature to those who are in the state of fear, and whether someone is in this state and perceives this feature is “existentially determined beforehand” (p. 176).

Essentially the same explanation can be given in support of Heidegger's insistence on the revelatory character of emotional states as has already been given for aspect perception. Just as in the case of duck/rabbit perception, it would be wrong to suggest that what the viewer sees is the bare shape onto which he *projects* the duckness or rabbitness, so it would be wrong to claim that the emotional subject experiences the world of “bare facts” onto which they project the fearfulness, say. In both cases the content of the experience is located in the objects themselves. The duck aspect is *what* is seen, and the object *as fearful* is what is experienced. This content is located in the world, and that this is so is a constitutive feature of these experiences.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Being and Time*, (p.176)

<sup>47</sup> A similar claim is John McDowell's, that “empirical substance is infused into concepts at the ground level” (*Mind and World* p.7). McDowell argues, along Kantian lines, against a divorce of empirical content from conceptual scheme.



Projectivist accounts of value similarly start from the fact that the attribution of value to some feature in the world begins with a reaction on the part of the subject, and conclude that the attribution is merely a projection of this response. Underlying this is a causal picture; that some feature in the world causes a reaction in the subject, who then mistakenly attributes further properties to the cause. This kind of “error” theory about value offers a causal explanation akin to the sort offered for our experience of secondary qualities. It is another question (which I shall not address) how plausible such explanations are.

If “projection” implies an *active* process, then, it is mistaken. But must it imply this? We have seen that Locke did not think this about experience of secondary properties. A slightly different example is afforded by Hume, who famously argued that causal relations were not strictly perceivable. Nevertheless we attribute them. But if Hume is correct, we can have no experience of them. Presumably, Hume did not think that we actively project these relations onto the world, but that we come to believe such relations to obtain, ultimately because of our constitution. Unlike the case of secondary qualities, there is not obviously anything here, in the phenomenology of the experience, which remains unaccounted for, or requiring explanation, once our alleged error has been exposed<sup>48</sup>. It is plausible to say here that it is our *beliefs* in causal relations which are projected. There are consequently no recalcitrant phenomenological features requiring explanation. This simply provides another example of the point made above, that phenomenology requires explanation even or especially, when the experience involves mistaken attributions.

We should also, briefly, ask what the status of secondary properties is. First of all, should we assume that secondary properties are less *real*? If mind-independence is the criterion of the real, then they are clearly not real. But by the same criterion mental states and consciousness itself may not count as

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<sup>48</sup> This, at least, is Hume’s view; causal relations are not perceived and so we have no immediate experience of them.

genuine features of reality.<sup>49</sup> But even if we are forced to accept this definition of “real”, the sting may have been removed to some extent from the charge. If values are as real as secondary properties or minds, then that may be a satisfactory result<sup>50</sup>.

For it is clear that the sense of “subjective” which means “not independent of minds” is quite distinct from that intended in saying that my dislike of asparagus is subjective. In the latter case, “subjective” implies personal idiosyncrasy. It is also distinct from another sense of “subjective” which implies a contrast with experiences which are *veridical*; in this sense, a hallucination is subjective. But this is not a sense we can attribute generally to values or emotions. As we have seen, there *are* standards of appropriateness which apply to emotional states and values. This brief discussion is not intended to settle the question of the status of values, but it indicates two points which block any straightforward denial of their objectivity. First, the phenomenology of value locates them in the world. This puts paid to any simple account of them as “decisions” or active projections. Second, it does not immediately follow from the fact of their mind-dependence that they are subjective.

The claim that emotions and values *are* a kind of decision, is however one that both Heidegger and Sartre make. The point is worth staying with for a moment since in both writers this claim sits alongside the phenomenological claim that emotions reveal something about the world. Can these two claims be consistently held? Secondly, in view of the fact that Heidegger explicitly *uses a theory of interpretation* or understanding (“*Verstehen*”) which he describes as the “*as-structure*”<sup>51</sup>, the *affinity with aspect-perception* is even

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<sup>49</sup> These issues are raised in McDowell, “Values and Secondary Properties” in Honderich (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity*, and in T.Nagel, “Subjective and Objective” in *Mortal Questions*, and *The View from Nowhere*. The analogy between values and secondary properties is disputed by Crispin Wright, “Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities”, *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 1988, and Colin McGinn *The Subjective View* ch.8.

<sup>50</sup> This, at least, is McDowell’s claim; it is disputed by Wright, *op.cit.*

<sup>51</sup> See *Being and Time* (p.149-150), and for discussion, Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind. ch.5.*



closer<sup>52</sup>. So the question arises how aspect-perception can be a product of the will.

In chapter two I referred to the claim made by both Roger Scruton and Wittgenstein himself that aspect-perception is subject to the will. The argument for this claim was that it can make sense to say to someone, "Now see it as a...", where the command is completed by referring to one of the aspects under which the object can be seen. But if aspects are a product of the will, then they must surely be subjective in some quite substantial sense.

How good an argument is this? First of all, there is the point that even if the command makes sense- to the extent that it is intelligible to ask someone to *try* to see something under an aspect- the subject may not always succeed, either because he does not have the ability to see aspects of that sort (perhaps aesthetic ones) or because, although he has the ability he cannot exercise it on this occasion<sup>53</sup>. So aspect-perception is not subject to the will straightforwardly. Secondly, the command is intelligible only in cases where the figure is an ambiguous one; that is to say where there is room for alternative conceptions (the same is true of ethical dilemmas). Thirdly, there is *no* sense in which I can see aspects *at will*, if this means simply "see them as I decide to". This is because aspect-perception involves concepts. Also, just in the same way as is true of belief, aspect perception is in an important sense passive. Descartes for instance, famously attempts, in the *Meditations*, to explain errors of judgement as products of the will. But the difficulties of this claim are well known.

In the case of Sartre, the aspect of his theory of the emotions to have attracted most attention among contemporary philosophers is his claim that emotions are purposive<sup>54</sup>. However, Sartre also endorses the view we have

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Mulhall provides an extended comparison of Wittgenstein and Heidegger on aspect-perception in *Being in the World; Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*.

<sup>53</sup> Similar points apply to *any* ability.

<sup>54</sup> Eg. Robert Solomon, "Emotion and Choice" in Rorty, A. (ed). *Explaining Emotions*, and in his book *The Passions*.

already looked at in connection with Heidegger, that emotions disclose features of the world;<sup>55</sup>

“When I suddenly conceive an object to be horrible...the horrible is now in the thing, at the heart of it, is its emotive texture, is constitutive of it. Thus, during emotion, an overwhelming and definitive quality of the thing makes its appearance... The “horrible” means indeed that horribleness is a substantial quality, that there is horribleness in the world.”<sup>56</sup>

As far as his claim about the purposiveness of emotional states goes, several objections can be raised. First, many of his examples are far-fetched and implausible<sup>57</sup>. Secondly, his account does not obviously fit cases of *immediate* emotional reactions such as fear on seeing a face at the window. Thirdly, although the claim that emotion resolves conflict by providing a substitute for effective action seems plausible for a range of cases, its range of applicability is not as great as Sartre claims. In addition to the cases of spontaneous emotions noted above, cases of positive emotions-happiness, joy etc.- do not seem to fit the construal as a product of inner conflict<sup>58</sup>. Fourthly, even if the theory is then restricted to the range of negative, non-spontaneous emotions, does it follow either that such emotions must involve *false* projections of properties onto the world, or that strategies of conflict resolution reveal the *essence* of such emotional states?

Sartre’s view is that emotions resolve conflicts between our desires and beliefs about the world, not by changing our desires, but by altering our perception of the world. Since it is assumed that the world itself has not changed, our altered perception must be false. However, even in cases where

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<sup>55</sup> However, he seems to differ from Heidegger in tending to see the “magical” properties of emotions as *falsely* projected onto the world. If this is correct, then he seems to be employing an empiricist conception of the “world”, at odds with his Heidegger-inspired conception of the world as phenomenologically related to human purposes.

<sup>56</sup> *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p.81-82.

<sup>57</sup> The point is made by Gregory McCulloch in *Using Sartre*(p.19/20). A good discussion of Sartre’s theory is “Sartre, Emotions and Wallowing” by David Weberman, (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 1996).

<sup>58</sup> This point is discussed in detail by Weberman op.cit.



there *is* a conflict of the sort identified, why must it be that the perception involved in the emotion is *false*? It may be that the world has changed, (for example in the case of grief, when someone *dies*), and it may be that emotions, rather than revealing false “facts” about the world or encouraging false beliefs, reveal (truly) facets of the world we might not have recognised otherwise. Further, even if there are some cases of the sort Sartre describes, it is one thing to say that these emotions have the function he describes, and another to say that this reveals the essence of the emotion. Sometimes specifying the function of something is also to specify its essence (eg. organs of the body). But not always; for booksellers the chief function of books is to produce profit, but the essence of a book is something else<sup>59</sup>, and something similar can be said of emotions.

To sum up then, Sartre may have identified a limited range of cases in which it is possible to claim that emotions serve the function of conflict resolution and action avoidance. It does not follow from this that they involve projections, in the relevant sense, onto the world. Nor does it follow that emotions are the product of the will.

Decision figures in Heidegger’s theory in a different way. Frederick Olafson summarises Heidegger’s view thus;

“What interpretation articulates is not a meaning that it first introduces, but the actual entity in question itself as it has been antecedently taken by Dasein and situated within the referential totality of its projects and so, of its world.”<sup>60</sup>

and he quotes Heidegger;

“...interpretation has always already decided either finally or with reservations in favour of a certain way of conceiving what it has to deal with.” (*Being and Time* p.100).

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<sup>59</sup> The example is Weberman’s, op.cit.

<sup>60</sup> Olafson op.cit (p.118/9)

Heidegger is anxious to claim that the total scheme of interpretation, which permits “interpretation-as”, is chosen and the product of decision. This is true even though the *subject* makes no choice or decision (as we have already argued) himself, and confronts the world as already interpreted, and demanding to be seen in a certain way.

Heidegger’s explanation of this fact is that the interpretative background, the network of concepts and practices which make our experience of the world meaningful is socially fixed or decided in advance of any individual subject. This has an obvious bearing on emotions. Exactly which emotions we *can* have is a function of the concepts and vocabulary available to us, and these are themselves located within a network of meanings and practices. Stephen Mulhall comments;

“When one claims that, for example, no-one in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain can experience the pride of the Samurai warrior because the relevant vocabulary is unavailable, “vocabulary” refers not merely to a set of Japanese terms, but to their role in a complex web of customs, assumptions and institutions. And because our affective life is conditioned by the culture in which we find ourselves, being immersed...in a particular...feeling is revelatory of something about the world in a further way. For our feeling horrified, for example.....also shows that our world is one in which the specific complex of feeling, situation and response that constitutes horror has a place- a world in which horror has a place.”<sup>61</sup>

This claim that our affective experience is a function of our local practices and vocabulary need not in itself lead to any radical scepticism about the objectivity of value upon which emotion relies. The fallacy of inferring negative conclusions of this sort from the empirical fact of cultural divergence is well known. Nevertheless, *as* an empirical fact, the claim is an interesting

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<sup>61</sup> Mulhall, “Heidegger and Being and Time” (p. 81).



one, and is shared by those “social constructionist” writers who have made similar claims regarding the relation between culture and emotion.<sup>62</sup>

However, if this is what is meant by saying that emotion is a product of the will, it resolves into further questions about the “objective” status of value, of the sort mentioned above. There is no suggestion that it involves anyone in actual decision-making.

So far then, I have been trying to defend the phenomenology of emotional and value experience as suggesting, *prima facie*, an objective construal of the features so revealed. The preceding arguments have attempted to show that claims to the effect that these experiences are the product of the will, are not effective in challenging this suggestion. In addition, we can perhaps also see that discussions of value and emotion which are conducted solely in terms of *beliefs* which subjects have about features of the world tends to conceal the phenomenological features of our experience. The net result of this is to fail to acknowledge something which- at least *prima facie*- supports an objectivist account. Further, even if, in the final analysis the objectivist account proves to be mistaken, the alternative theory will have to provide an explanation not merely for our false *beliefs*, but for the phenomenology of our experience<sup>63</sup>. Contemporary discussions of ethics generally acknowledge the phenomenological character of ethical experience. Discussions of emotions, however, tend to be dominated by talk of beliefs, which sidelines the phenomenology of these states and makes it easier to think of them as projections.

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<sup>62</sup> For a representative selection, see R.Harré (ed) *The Emotions; Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*. A similar kind of argument is presented in Peter Berger, “The Obsolescence of the Concept of Honour” in MacIntyre (ed) *Illuminations*.

<sup>63</sup> Just as different explanations are called for the “projections” discussed by Locke and Hume, (above) respectively.

## The Art of Persuasion.

At the end of the section before last, I tried to connect two things; the difference between the ideas of “phantasia” and belief on the one hand, and the idea of conviction. I claimed that conviction was not merely a matter of acquiring the right beliefs. We can have those and yet remain unconvinced. What the unconvinced believer lacks, I suggested, can usefully be thought of in terms of what Aristotle, the Stoics and others meant by “phantasia”- a kind of appearance, or way of seeing things. The difference between this kind of experience and belief alone is also striking in the case of emotion. Animals are said by Aristotle to lack belief but have emotions, and in our own case, our emotional states often lack the relevant beliefs. This is most striking perhaps in the case of emotional responses to fiction, where there is something cognitive which amounts to a kind of being convinced, but lacks the commitment to truth which characterises belief.

I suggested also that one area in which we could observe emotional phantasia constituting the basis of conviction is in the practice of rhetorical persuasion. This is the claim that I will now try to defend. In fact persuasion of the relevant sort is quite widespread, and not strictly confined only to those works which we would recognise or class as works of rhetoric or to the speeches of gifted orators. Literary works of art (and perhaps works in other media too - although I shall concentrate on literature here.) share many of the same features as rhetoric, and differ from the unalloyed belief-inducing nature of deductive argument in the same way. Fortunately this pairing of literary art with rhetoric is not new. Plato, the philosopher most notoriously hostile to the practice of rhetorical persuasion, believed they were alike in possessing many of the same inadequacies.

My discussion of rhetoric will be selective, focusing in Plato’s main objections to it and to art. I will also refer occasionally to Aristotle’s treatise



on Rhetoric. My aim is not to be comprehensive, historically or otherwise<sup>64</sup>, but to relate the problem of rhetoric specifically to the range of problems discussed above.

## The Problem with Rhetoric.

When we describe an argument as “rhetorical” this is generally taken to imply something pejorative. Is this because we assume that rhetoric appeals to the emotions rather than to reason, whereas we take it that an argument should provide solid facts and reasons deductively connected? Is it true, in that case, that rhetoric does *not* provide arguments? Or is it that, *in addition* to any arguments it may offer, the real force of rhetoric is its sway over the emotions, which might amount to *manipulation* rather than rational persuasion?

To articulate some of these suspicions more clearly I will begin by summarising what I think have been the most lasting and influential arguments against rhetoric, and then deal with each of them in turn.

1. Rhetoric works by appeal to emotion, and emotion always distorts things. Stirring up emotion can only cloud perception and encourage failures of understanding, exaggeration and bias.
2. Rhetoric *manipulates* its audience through the arousal of emotion. Argument, by contrast, is not open to this charge; it appeals directly to the facts and proceeds deductively. It engages the rational subject and so does not indulge in manipulation.

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<sup>64</sup> A good survey of the ancient literature which is both historical and analytic is Wardy's *The Birth of Rhetoric*

3. Rhetoric involves no argument; it proves nothing, nor does it *refute* contrary claims or arguments. Furthermore it is not based in any kind of knowledge. It is therefore empty, mere words.

4. Rhetoric can always be put to bad ends; in the hands of a dishonest orator, an audience can be persuaded to endorse what is false or pernicious. A good argument, on the other hand, is always a good argument, whoever uses it, because it always bears the same relation to truth.

5. Rhetoric (and art) seek to produce pleasure in their audiences. They therefore pander to their listeners' tastes just as, say, cookery does to culinary pleasures. Consequently, they embody no concern for what is right or good.

6. Related to the last objection, it is claimed that both rhetoric and art have a bad effect on the *characters* of their audience, because in pandering to pleasures and engaging the audience's emotions, they appeal to the worst element in human beings.

If these arguments can be successfully dealt with, the possibility will be open for us to offer a positive account of the value of art and rhetoric. Let us turn then to the first objection.

### *First Objection.*

This first objection makes the familiar mistake of assuming that emotions can only ever *interfere* with the cognitive processes of Reason, but do not themselves involve the cognitive grasp of anything. We have seen that this is a mistake. Emotions involve understanding, and can be rational and appropriate to their object. It is of course true that emotion *can* distort judgement. But it is also true that our reasoning procedures themselves can lead to error. That emotions can be inappropriate or misleading is no more an argument against them than the fact that beliefs and reasons can equally be inappropriate or can mislead is an argument against *them*.



### *Second Objection.*

What is it to manipulate someone? The second objection offers an answer to this question. It claims that we manipulate someone when we fail to engage the agent himself (or his “autonomous self”) and it then adds that the real or autonomous self is identical with the agent’s Reason. Subliminal advertising, for example, might be an instance of such manipulation in that it is said to work by a causal mechanism which bypasses the agent’s deliberative faculties.

However, let us suppose we accept the first of these two claims, that manipulation is a failure to engage the real person, and even his deliberative faculties. Why, however, must we also accept the second claim that emotional states play no part in this? What supports the claim that to appeal to someone’s emotions is not to appeal to or engage the real person? Nothing *could* support it because, first of all, it embodies the same basic error as the first objection- that is, that reason and emotion are quite distinct. But again, this is what has been denied above; emotions *are* rational. Furthermore, it simply *assumes* that the subject’s “real self” is identical with his “Reason”, and this claim is both unsupported and insupportable.

### *Third Objection.*

We can break the third objection down into three separate charges; First, that rhetoric does not involve argument. Second that it does not prove or refute anything, and third, that it is not based on any kind of knowledge.

The first of these is fairly obviously false. Aristotle, in his treatise on rhetoric, distinguishes three genres; *Epedeictic* or ceremonial rhetoric; *Forensic* rhetoric, and *Deliberative* rhetoric. The last two of these in particular- suited to court-room persuasion and addressing an audience who are faced with some important decision to make, respectively- clearly do involve the presentation of arguments. Aristotle is especially keen to deny that rhetoric involves only appeals to emotion. In both these two forms of rhetoric, persuasion must involve a presentation and consideration of

arguments; in the forensic case, Aristotle considers that the “*enthymeme*” is a particularly appropriate form of argument<sup>65</sup>. The “*enthymeme*” is an argument that is not strictly deductively valid. Like much rhetorical argument it relies on general commonly held beliefs (“*endoxa*”). So in the forensic context, the orator might argue, for instance, that since a suspect’s footprints were at the scene of the crime, his fingerprints were found on the murder weapon and he had harboured a grudge against the victim that it is reasonable to conclude that he was guilty of murder<sup>66</sup>. Deliberative rhetoric must also be based on arguments since the reliability of the orator’s views will face the test of time; events will either prove him right or wrong, and his reputation as an orator will depend on this outcome.

Since it seems clear that rhetoric does involve argument, we might think that the rhetorical elements are then something over and above the arguments, but *themselves* involve no argument. In the forensic case just described, the argument concerns the probability of the suspect’s guilt given the evidence. And as such it stands or falls on its own merits. The rhetorical elements enter in the *presentation* of the argument; whether it is put in such a way as to produce conviction, whether the speaker portrays himself in such a way as to inspire confidence, whether his tone of voice, stock of metaphors and so on, produce the correct result. If this is correct, however, it shows that rhetoric *does* have a role in producing a distinct cognitive state, namely conviction, as opposed to mere belief. This is what was argued above. So we can conclude, I think, that the first part of the objection which we started with, has not been substantiated.

The second part of this objection is the claim that rhetoric does not refute or prove anything<sup>67</sup>. However, from what we have just said, it is clear that rhetoric can refute and prove in the uncontroversial way that argument can, because it *involves* argument. The objector, however, may concede this point,

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<sup>65</sup> *The Art of Rhetoric* 1368a30ff.

<sup>66</sup> The example is from Amelie Rorty, “Structuring Rhetoric” (p.4) in *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, eds. Rorty and Nussbaum.

<sup>67</sup> This is one of Plato’s arguments against rhetoric in the *Gorgias* (472).



but still insist that it is the *arguments* that prove and refute, not the rhetoric. And so rhetoric itself is incapable of proof or refutation.

Certainly, if “proof” is *defined* as the conclusion of a deductive argument, then it will of course be true that nothing but argument can result in proof. However, if we do not make this stipulation, then some room remains for things other than deductive arguments to deliver proof. I shall shortly give reasons why we should not make this stipulation. This will allow us to claim that, in addition to producing conviction (as opposed to belief) rhetoric can be a vehicle of *proof* in a way in which deductive argument cannot. I will return to these points below.

The third part of the present objection is that rhetoric and art are not based on any kind of knowledge. This claim is one that is made by Plato in the early dialogue *Ion*<sup>68</sup>, in his attack on rhetoric in the *Gorgias*<sup>69</sup>, and in the *Republic*<sup>70</sup>. There are two allied points here. First is that the rhetorician possesses no expertise (*techne*), no real body of knowledge upon which his activities are based. The second is that while the poet or orator presents us with *images* of excellence in the form of noble and heroic characters, which convince their audience, the poet does not possess *real* knowledge of human excellence. Knowledge of the *required* sort is the province of dialectic and philosophy. What the poet produces is a beguiling *appearance* of excellence. If this is correct then it follows not only that there is nothing that the poet knows which the philosopher doesn't - quite the reverse in fact - but that there is nothing to be *learned* from the writings of poets. Or, to be more precise, nothing that we can learn from them that we couldn't learn at the hands of the philosopher, or from some other source.

The first of these two points then is that for activity to be the product of real knowledge, there must be a storable body of rules or principles which are tested and reliable. Nothing which does not meet the standards of a *techne* can count as knowledge. Plato's examples of a *techne* are medical and

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<sup>68</sup> *Ion* 534c-d

<sup>69</sup> *Gorgias* 459.

<sup>70</sup> *Republic* 598e-599c.

mathematical knowledge, where it is indeed plausible that there *are* such bodies of principle and rule. But is all knowledge like this? It was one of the main claims of chapter two that this assumption is an error. Much of our understanding in different fields is not the result of grasping principles and rules which can then be formulated, and this is sufficient to defuse the present objection.

The second point is that real knowledge is arrived at through dialectic, and it consists in general principles. Thus to answer a typical Socratic question such as, "What is X?", by offering examples of X's, involves a misunderstanding. The answer, whatever it is, will take the form of a general account of what X is *as such*. Since poetry and rhetoric do not offer this kind of knowledge, they do not offer real knowledge at all. In reading about Homer or Anna Karenina we do not gain any new knowledge since we are told nothing that could count as knowledge. All we are offered is a detailed account of the lives of a group of characters. We might try perhaps to cull from art works some kind of generalisations; such as, from *Pride and Prejudice*- "Stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart"; from *Crime and Punishment*, "Punishment for a crime frightens a criminal less than we think because the criminal himself demands it"<sup>71</sup>. Perhaps these are truths that we can claim to find in these works, but the value of reading novels surely does not consist in grasping them.

The objection can be met if we can show how we can gain knowledge or understanding which is not of the general sort required by Plato. The only thing Plato counts as real knowledge is *episteme*<sup>72</sup>; general truths, statable in

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<sup>71</sup> The examples are from J,Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1992.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Christopher Janaway, *Images of Excellence*. Janaway takes issue with Plato's account; "Plato suffers less from a radical misconception about poetry than from his severe and outlandish conception of what qualifies as knowledge. One powerful reply to Plato...begins with the thought that there is a knowledge that is best acquired from imaginative engagement with images of human beings in the *particularity* of their actions and feelings." (p.130). It is of course true that in Plato's account of our grasp of the Form of the Good (in the *Republic*) this insistence on propositional knowledge is abandoned. The image of the sun as



propositional form. The assumption Plato makes is that in the case of ethical understanding, for example, anything that could count as such understanding will consist in the grasp of some general propositions. But perhaps not all learning and understanding is of this sort. Below I will argue that Plato is mistaken in this assumption and that therefore it is the case both that art may be based on knowledge and that we can learn from it things we cannot learn from philosophy.

This completes my consideration of the third objection, with two points outstanding which will be addressed below.

#### *Fourth Objection.*

The fourth objection suggests a difference between rhetoric and dialectic or argument; namely that while a good argument is always a good argument (ie; validly deduced, with true conclusions etc.) successful persuasion is not always good but can easily be put to bad ends, for example if used by a wicked orator. So, rhetoric and dialectic do not bear the same relation to knowledge and truth. This is another of Plato's objections from the *Gorgias*<sup>73</sup>. We might sum it up this way; knowledge and truth have *intrinsic* value, which is always the same, since what is true does not become any the less true given a change of circumstances. Rhetoric, on the other hand, only possesses *instrumental* value; if it is used to good ends then it may be valuable, but if used in pursuit of what is not good then it loses its value.

This objection is taken up by Aristotle in his treatise on rhetoric. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates's interlocutor had claimed that rhetoric *should* never be put to unjust ends. Aristotle makes a stronger claim; he admits that rhetorical persuasion *can* go wrong in the relevant sense, but he claims that there is less danger of this than we might suppose, and the reason he offers in support of his optimism is the belief that truth is naturally more *convincing* than

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something that resists codification and requires to be *seen* suggests the importance of *perception*. However this qualification does not substantially effect the present point.

<sup>73</sup> *Gorgias* 461.

untruth.<sup>74</sup>This is connected, in Aristotle, with his view (*Metaphysics* 989A21) that “people naturally desire to *know*”. So Aristotle’s reply to the Socratic objection is that we have a natural disposition to be convinced by the truth rather than by falsehood, and this constitutes a limit on the extent to which rhetoric can be misused. No doubt Aristotle is here being over-optimistic about the extent to which people do desire the truth rather than pleasing falsehood. It is not really clear either why truth should be intrinsically more *convincing* than falsehood.

In any case, even if we are forced to concede Socrates’ point, how damaging is it to the case for rhetoric? What follows from the fact that we can persuade someone of what is not true? As remarked in the discussion of the previous objection, what the defender of rhetoric wants to maintain is first; that rhetoric involves conviction rather than simply belief, and that argument typically leads to belief; second, there are cases where rhetoric can be a means of proof, which argument cannot. Are either of these two claims threatened by the present objection? I don’t think so. Both of these claims are compatible with the acknowledgement that there is a range of instances in which persuasion convinces us of what is false rather than true. In addition, it is not so obvious that argument *itself* does not lead, on occasion, to false beliefs. Consider someone being led through the steps of Zeno’s or the Sorites Paradox. They might (falsely) be led to the conclusion that the arrow will never reach its target or that there is no clear distinction between baldness and having hair. In acquiring such beliefs, they may of course remain unconvinced by them, but there is nothing to stop them acquiring such false beliefs.

#### *Fifth Objection.*

This objection is also due to Plato<sup>75</sup>. The idea is that dialectic proceeds by argument; example, counter-example, refutation<sup>76</sup> are its usual methods.

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<sup>74</sup> *Rhetoric* (1355A37-8); “to speak without qualification, what is true and what is better are always naturally easier to argue for and more persuasive.”

<sup>75</sup> *Gorgias* 467.



Rhetoric does not attempt to instruct its audience in this way, since such instruction is demanding in a variety of ways. Instead it appeals to the lowest common denominator- pleasure. Dialectic aims at truth, while rhetoric aims at conviction. It achieves this through appeal to pleasure, and in this way shows little or no regard for truth or the good. Like many television programmes, for example, rhetoric panders to low tastes, with no regard to whether the pleasure is appropriate or good.

In replying to this objection, should the defender of rhetoric admit that it *can* be used to appeal to low tastes, or should he try to insist that this is impossible? In the same spirit as our previous reply, it seems better to allow that rhetoric can involve an appeal to cheap emotion; it can seek to gratify a crowd by whipping up emotion of a pleasant sort (pleasant wrath or self-righteous indignation, for example.). But what follows from this? In particular, does it follow that rhetoric always and only does this? Surely not. We may want to accept that a large amount of everyday political rhetoric, for example, involves such appeals. Politicians may appeal to nationalist emotions as a means of currying favour for a given policy, and such appeals may be a calculated dodge. There may be tricky and substantive issues the politician is attempting to gloss over. But in conceding this, we are not forced to admit that the same must true of any use of rhetoric.

By comparison, Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech might be defended as an attempt to appeal to and arouse emotions that are *appropriate* to the context. Indeed, we might argue that the emotional response is precisely what the situation requires. This last point has divided legal theorists. There are those who claim that legal argument can never legitimately appeal to emotion, and there are others who argue that an appropriate emotional response is often what is required if we can be thought to have grasped the situation correctly.<sup>77</sup> These are points I will return to

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<sup>76</sup> There is disagreement over whether the Socratic *elenchus* can be strictly a *refutation*, since what it really consists of is pointing to a contradiction implicit or explicit in what has been said. Neither of these contradictory views has yet been *refuted*.

<sup>77</sup> These issues are explored in more detail by Nussbaum in her *Poetic Justice*.

below, but for the present, it should be clear that we are not forced by the present objection to concede that rhetoric always appeals to low emotion without regard to what is good or appropriate. The same is true of art. Dickens, for instance, occasionally succumbs to lapses of judgement- the death of Little Nell is a notorious example of appeal to emotion which is generally agreed to be sentimental. Generally, however, his writing does not suffer from this defect. He appeals to emotion, certainly, often as a means of convincing us of some social evil, but both the appeal and the emotions aroused are usually appropriate. The present objection therefore fails.

### *Sixth Objection.*

The final objection also features in Plato<sup>78</sup>. It is related to the previous objection via the pleasure-giving qualities of art. The charge in essence is that by taking pleasure in the fate of fictional heroes and characters, at the safe distance afforded by their fictional status, we let down our guard and fail to recognise the fact that these emotions will insinuate themselves into our real lives. There are at least two points which need to be distinguished in this claim. One is the point that by allowing ourselves to take *pleasure* in the misfortunes of fictional characters, the effect of this will be to distance ourselves from our *own* experience- to aestheticise it and ultimately take pleasure in it<sup>79</sup>. A second point is that by appeal to the lower part of our nature, the rational part of us is subordinated, and this has a pernicious effect on our character. This charge shares something with the first objection considered above, that bypassing rationality is a danger because it is an abandoning of self-mastery and ultimately selfhood.

How should we respond to this attack? First of all, we should not be too quick to dismiss Plato's thinking here. If we are at all optimistic about the role of literature in the educational process, we shall have to endorse the

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<sup>78</sup> Especially *Republic* (606-7).

<sup>79</sup> While this objection is primarily directed at art rather than rhetoric, rhetoric may itself urge emotional responses to fictional deeds and characters, and to that extent is open to the same attack.



claim that imaginative engagement with fictional characters, and especially the emotions aroused in response to them, can play some role in the process of altering our real-life emotional responses. This point has been argued in a previous chapter. But if we concede that imaginative engagement with fictions can have this kind of effect upon real life, we leave open the kind of possibility that worries Plato. For the easiest response to Plato's challenge is simply to declare that our responses to fictions have no bearing on our real emotions and attitudes. Contemporary controversy about the effect of television<sup>80</sup>, say - and in particular of television violence- on the emotions and character of viewers, raises the same issue. And it is a fairly typical response to this kind of allegation to simply deny that any such relation exists. But to insist on this also involves cutting off the same route by which fictions might educate.

In view of this, I think we should refrain from this response. In addition, we might object that it is one thing to take pleasure in the misfortunes of Don Quixote or even Ana Karenina, and another to take pleasure in the graphic depiction of violent acts. *What* is found pleasant will be different in these cases. The first two cases arguably involve aesthetic elements lacking in the third. Is it possible nevertheless that someone could come to enjoy the depiction of violent acts? Nothing can rule this out. However experience suggests that even repeated viewing of such scenes may not lessen their repellent aspect for most viewers. Most viewers come to such scenes with fairly deeply entrenched reactions towards suffering. It is difficult to say with any precision what conditions are required to alter a person's attitude towards, say, scenes of torture, so that they come to take pleasure in them, but it is plausible to think that a considerable revolution in attitude is necessary. However, such a revolution is *not* required for us to aestheticise our own experience. This is something we can slip into almost unnoticed. So Plato is perhaps on more solid ground in this case. But again, we can grant the presence of this danger without being forced to admit that it *always*

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<sup>80</sup> The parallel between Plato's argument and debates about television is pointed out by A. Nehamas in "Plato and the Mass Media", *Monist* 1988.



occurs. Furthermore Plato seems simply mistaken in his claim that art bypasses our reasoning faculty; when we respond to fictions we usually think our responses are appropriate to their objects. He seems to be wrong then to insist that art always appeals to a lower part of the soul.

This concludes my review of the main objections to art and rhetoric outlined above. I have not claimed that these objections are exhaustive. However, they do represent the most persistent sources of hostility to rhetoric in the relevant literature. If they can be successfully rebutted- as I have claimed they can be- we shall be well on the way to a defence of rhetoric and art. However, there remain two points which I left outstanding in the discussion above. The first was the claim that rhetoric can, in addition to being a source of conviction distinct from argument, itself be a form of proof. The second was the claim that there can be understanding and knowledge which is unlike the *episteme* which Plato focuses on. If correct, this would allow us to see how we could learn things from literature which we cannot learn from philosophy.<sup>81</sup>

How could rhetoric itself be a form of proof? What makes us hostile to the claim that it *could* be is, I suggest, our conventional ideas about proof and rationality. That is, we typically assume that a good argument is one that begins from premises which any rational person will accept as true and proceeds by valid deductions to a conclusion which is also true. It is easy to

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<sup>81</sup> A recent account of our understanding of works of fiction, which is parallel in some respects to Plato's, is that of Lamarque and Olsen;

"...if literary works are construed as having the constitutive aim of advancing truths about human concerns by means of general propositions implicitly or explicitly contained in them, then one should expect some kind of supporting argument, the more so since the purported truths are mostly controversial. However, there are no such arguments or debates, either in the works themselves or in literary criticism.", Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, p. 368.

The authors then argue that since, "knowledge is achieved by marshalling evidence for whatever truth-claim is being made" (p. 368), the only possible way to argue for the cognitive status of literary works is either, "to redefine the concepts of knowledge and truth-seeking, at least loosening the connection with supportive evidence and argument" (p.369), or to concede that whatever value literary works have, it does not lie in the *cognitive* contribution they make. It is the first of these strategies I am pursuing here.



assume that this is what rationality must be. Such a picture of rationality has already been confronted in chapter three when we looked at the ideas of Jonathan Dancy and John McDowell, who argue - adopting arguments of Wittgenstein - that this misconceives the nature of our understanding. The assumption lying behind it is that if an issue or attitude is capable of proof then that proof is something which will convince *all* rational agents and is statable in propositional form. And we assume that both these are necessary features of anything that can be called rational. But the problem with this account- as I have already argued- is that the starting points, the “uncontroversial” premises, may not be obviously true to everyone. Seeing the truth of the premise may require judgement and perception- “correct seeing” in Aristotle’s terms . The fact that we have to be able to see that the starting point is true means, of course, that we cannot *arrive* at its truth as the result of a further argument. But if this is correct, there will be a crucial gap in our understanding which argument itself cannot fill.

In moral and aesthetic contexts, for instance, there is, notoriously, no valid deductive argument whose conclusion is that, for example, a given action is selfish, or that a certain architectural form is beautiful.<sup>82</sup>

Several objections may spring to mind at this point. In the first place it might be doubted that anything “perceived” in this way could be objective in the way we required for proof. Secondly, we might insist that only what is deductively valid *could* be proof. These objections are however mistaken. First of all, there are many things I know to be true without having them proved to me. When I am in pain, I neither have nor require *proof* that I am in pain; at least, if anything is proof then the *pain* certainly is. This then is a kind of knowledge that does not require proof - knowledge *by acquaintance*, perhaps. So it is clear that deductive argument is not the only legitimate route to knowledge. And the notion of *legitimacy* is what motivates the value we ascribe to “proof”; we mean something like some consideration that leads

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<sup>82</sup> It may however be possible to offer an argument to the effect that someone is selfish, which relies on acceptance of the fact that certain behaviour, for instance, betrays a selfish nature. But this connection is not itself deductively established.

appropriately to correct understanding. "Proof" is a normative idea. But once we accept this, we can see that there is no reason to suppose that only *argument* could provide an *appropriate* basis.

The same point can be put using the notion of rationality. When completing the arithmetic series 2,4,6,8... is it rational to think that the next number will be 10? We would normally think it is, but the question raises all the issues about rule-following discussed in chapter two. Those arguments show that there is no deductively valid argument to *prove* that 10 is the correct choice. If it is *rational* to complete the series in that way what makes us accept this is at bottom a certain *grasp* of things, a perspective, a way of seeing. And this cannot itself be the result of argument.

I have argued that we should accept that things other than argument can count as proof, where that means some kind of consideration which leads appropriately to correct understanding. For instance, in coming to see that an action is selfish or the form of a building is beautiful, I will perhaps listen to the description of someone who already sees things in that way, and try, by exercising some imagination, to think myself into this point of view. The description however leads *appropriately* to my correct perception, although it is only *seen* to be appropriate from within the perspective attained.

One function of rhetoric, and of some art, is to facilitate the process of correct perception. In the case of rhetoric, a speech such as Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a conscious attempt to encourage the correct perspective in the audience. But in these cases, the correct perspective is one that involves emotion. Here we meet again the claim that emotion is itself a kind of right seeing, and something distinct from belief. So we have three claims about rhetoric; that it can lead to correct seeing; that this correct seeing is a kind of *conviction*, distinct from belief; and lastly, that the correct seeing involved requires an emotional response<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> In other words, good rhetoric produces *convincing phantasia*, and convincing *phantasia* are those which produce the emotional response. Other writers have noted the connection between *phantasia* and rhetoric; A. Rorty "Structuring Rhetoric" (p.20-21), G.Striker,



Someone listening to King's speech will hopefully have a vivid sense of the injustices of racism and the nobility of the ideals King describes<sup>84</sup>. And it seems that poems and novels can perform a similar function.<sup>85</sup> Where they succeed, they produce understanding by (ideally) appropriate means. But if we are prepared to grant this, we seem to be allowing that the understanding or knowledge which such works afford us is not propositional in nature. Reading *Anna Karenina* does not convince us of the truth of some general proposition<sup>86</sup>. But how then can it amount to knowledge at all? This brings us to the second point I promised to pick up from the previous discussion. How can there be real knowledge which is not in the form of *episteme*, as Plato claimed? If we want to defend the importance of literature as a source of

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"Emotions in Context; Aristotle's Treatment of the Passions" (p.289) (Both in A.Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*); and R.Wardy *The Birth of Rhetoric* (p.114-115). On Aristotle's treatment of *phantasia* itself, I have drawn on; M.Schofield, "Aristotle on the Imagination", D.Frede "The Cognitive Role of Phantasia" (Both in A. Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*) and M.Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*, essay five; R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, chs. 1-4; Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Emotions and Ethical Health" in *The Therapy of Desire*; Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, ch. 2.4.

<sup>84</sup> King's speech also serves as a good reminder that the *speaker* plays a crucial role. First, as Aristotle notes (*Art of Rhetoric*), the speaker portrays himself as a certain kind of character—as trustworthy, and so on. But whether a speaker can achieve this effect will depend on factors about him beyond his control. Voice and visual aspect are important factors in the overall impression, and must be acknowledged in any account of the factors which make rhetoric "convincing".

<sup>85</sup> In her article "Anything but Argument?" (*Philosophical Investigations* 1985) Cora Diamond also argues against the monopoly of argument and in support of the role of literature as a source of conviction. She compares a philosophical argument to the effect that killing animals simply to eat them is immoral (the argument is Peter Singer's) with a satirical poem. The poem works by encouraging a cosy view of farm animals and our relationship to them, then brutally breaks the spell of this illusion in a way that highlights the inconsistencies in our attitudes towards animals. Both of these can be convincing in their different ways, and both, she claims, can be appropriate grounds for change of perception and understanding.

<sup>86</sup> See note 72 above.



learning there are several questions we must address<sup>87</sup>. Do works of art embody knowledge, and if so, what sort of knowledge; and secondly why is this knowledge something that could not be grasped by other means- through philosophical dialectic<sup>88</sup>, for instance? Plato, even in the later dialogues, particularly the *Phaedrus*, in which his hostility towards poetry is modified and he allows it a valuable role, still insists that is only a *supplement* to philosophical enquiry, which remains the *real* source of knowledge. So what can we learn from novels that can only be learned from *them*?

Nussbaum offers three considerations in support of the art work<sup>89</sup>. First, if we assume that there *is* a level of generality at which we can state the content of a work of art, such as the examples given above from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Crime and Punishment* (see n.72) then these are surely propositions which *philosophy* can show to be either true or false. So if this is what we understand from novels, then it is hard to see why we need a novel to grasp it. Indeed it may in some cases seem that dialectic is the only legitimate means of establishing the truth of such claims. Nussbaum's response is to argue that even these general claims cannot easily be evaluated by philosophical method. What such evaluation would require is looking in *detail* at a specific case which can then be said to be typical in certain respects. But the need for detail, for the in-depth depiction of a particular case is what the *novel* provides and what dialectic cannot<sup>90</sup>. Nussbaum's example

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<sup>87</sup> The following discussion draws on Martha Nussbaum's "Flawed Crystals" and other papers in her collection *Love's Knowledge*.

<sup>88</sup> Nussbaum (p.6-7) offers the comparison of children learning mathematics through stories. It may be that this makes learning easier but there is nothing about such knowledge which could *only* be grasped in this way.

<sup>89</sup> Nussbaum (op.cit) p.140-142.

<sup>90</sup> Here we can distinguish at least two kinds of contribution novels might make. The first is that novels are capable of the kind of detailed description of the *complexity* of situation and character which we require for real understanding. Philosophical style (see Nussbaum's third point, below) cannot deliver this kind of complexity.

Secondly, as has been argued above, novels may offer a kind of understanding that is, as we might put it, "perspectival". One feature of such understanding, which has been argued above, is that what is understood is not available from all perspectives (Dancy and McDowell's



is drawn from Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* which offers the detailed depiction of the relationship between a father and daughter. A full grasp of the ethical dimensions of the characters, their deliberations and perceptions, Nussbaum claims, is the kind of thing needed to support any general proposition we might reach on the basis of it. So dialectic alone is inadequately equipped to provide this sort of understanding.

The second consideration Nussbaum offers is that lying behind the Platonic claim about *episteme* is the assumption, applied to ethical knowledge, that understanding must consist in the grasp of general principles. However we have already seen reason - in chapter three- to doubt this account of understanding. First of all, grasp of general principles will be insufficient to cope with the complexity of decision-making. Second, understanding may be the sort of thing which is only *shown* in the grasp of *particulars*.

Understanding is, in another sense, however, general- we can apply it generally to a range of cases. It may also be universalisable, at least within broad limits<sup>91</sup>. Someone may have a grasp of general principles and have

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point). This bears a relation to Thomas Nagel's discussion of subjectivity. Nagel claims that not all knowledge should be thought of as grasped from a completely external point of view. Much of our knowledge is in one sense subjective (see discussion in previous section) - for instance our knowledge of *what it is like*. It therefore seems plausible to suggest that novels offer knowledge of just this sort.

Lamarque and Olsen object to this claim on the grounds that it is not legitimate to assert that understanding based on *experience* in this way constitutes knowledge; "...it seems a much less acceptable extension of terminology to say that an experience as such can be a kind of knowledge (albeit "subjective" knowledge, or "knowledge what it is like"). It is more plausible to suppose, not that the experience is the knowledge, but that knowledge arises *as a result* of the experience." (*Truth, Fiction and Literature* p. 373)

However, I do not share these intuitions; it seems to me perfectly acceptable usage to say that perceptual experience say, of colour, is knowledge of colour. To insist that this at best *gives rise to* knowledge is simply to insist that that all knowledge must be "knowledge that...". But this assumption seems highly questionable, indeed false.

<sup>91</sup> Although what counts as "same case" precludes any crude universalisability. In addition there may be areas of our lives where universalisability is not a requirement; eg the cases discussed by Winch in "Universalisability".



general *beliefs* about good conduct, expressible using them, but conspicuously fail when it comes to particular cases. This may be either because, although they have the general principles they are unable to correctly apply them, or simply because the rules are themselves simply not sufficiently *fine-grained* to cope with specific cases. The first of these two difficulties shows that even if the person deliberating possesses rules, understanding them must amount to more than the mere grasp of the rules. Knowing *when they apply* is not something that can be explained in terms by referring to the rules themselves, on pain of infinite regress. This suggests that if literature can help in the learning process, it will do so by educating *perception*; but this process is certainly not one of acquiring general propositions of the sort that would meet the standards of episteme<sup>92</sup>.

The third point made by Nussbaum concerns style. If the job of understanding requires the presentation of *particulars*, then the style of moral philosophy is not conducive to it;

“..it cannot easily be done by texts which speak with the hardness or plainness which moral philosophy has traditionally chosen for itself- for how can this style at all convey the way in which “the matter of the practical” appears before the agent in all of its bewildering complexity, without its morally salient feature stamped on its face”. (P.142)

Under pressure from the idea that moral theory - if it is to count as knowledge - must be something that meets the standards of *techne* and *episteme* as Plato sees them, the style of philosophical writing in matters of ethics, broadly construed, is often chosen to meet this standard rather than as a means of promoting real understanding.<sup>93</sup> These points support the claim

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<sup>92</sup> Nussbaum quotes Wittgenstein; “Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through “*experience*”- Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*.- That is what “learning” and “teaching” are like here. - What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right.” (*Philosophical Investigations*. part 2, sec2, 227e)

<sup>93</sup> Other writers concur with Nussbaum in this diagnosis. Michael Tanner, after taking a wry look at W. Newton Smith’s conditional analysis of the concept of love concludes, “What is



that understanding is not simply a grasp of generalities, but a “discernment of particulars”. This is the approach to understanding that was described and defended in chapter two, and it shows how art can be a source of understanding which philosophical argument cannot provide<sup>94</sup>.

In addition to the three arguments offered by Nussbaum, we may add, I think, a more general one. In thinking about understanding a proposition, say, it is easy to suppose that what is grasped is strictly limited, or *finite*. Take for example the proposition that “many memories tend with time to become exaggerated or distorted and ultimately untrue”. What does understanding this come to? Certainly, a grasp of the meanings of the words, and of the sentence as a whole is required. But is that *sufficient* for real understanding? An alternative picture might be that such understanding is the *starting* point, but that understanding is really a process that is open-ended; we discover more of what the proposition means in detail, for instance, as we live through circumstances in which it is borne out. But this *filling out* is not merely a *supplement* to understanding the proposition, it is understanding. Consider the following passage from Harriet Doerr’s novel “*Stones for Ibarra*”<sup>95</sup>;

“Every day for a month Richard has reminded Sara, “We mustn’t expect too much”. And each time his wife has answered, “No”. But the Evertons expect too much. They have experienced the terrible persuasion of a great-aunt’s recollections and adopted them as their own. They have not considered that memories are like corks left out of bottles. They swell. They no longer fit”.

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needed is a recognition that there are other modes of rigour and precision than quasi-formal ones, and ways of being profound that do not require near unintelligibility”. (Nussbaum p.20)

<sup>94</sup> Lamarque and Olsen (*Truth, Fiction and Literature* p. 386ff.) object to Nussbaum’s view on the grounds that, as an account of *the value of art*, it is inadequate. Were this the intent of Nussbaum’s account, they would have a point, since clearly not all art works aim to provide (ethical) understanding in the way Nussbaum describes. But taken simply as an argument to the effect that *some* art works contribute to our understanding in this way, the objection is beside the point.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* p.26.

This short passage, and the simile with which it ends, describe the distortion of memory. The simile comparing memories to swollen corks provides us with a suggestive image of how this process works, and for the *way* in which memory becomes distorted. Do we understand anything new by reading this passage- something that we did not grasp in the original proposition with which I began? The only reason for assuming the answer must be “no” can be the assumption which I questioned above. But, in contrast to that idea, as I have suggested, our understanding *has* been enhanced and fleshed out. We understand it differently; the simile has transformed our understanding of the general proposition.

But what is it that the passage really adds to our understanding? The simile is itself general- it talks about memories (in general) being like corks. What the simile adds, is not (*pace* Nussbaum) the benefit of a *particular* instance. Rather, what it offers is something *concrete*. So, a general proposition, then, can be contrasted not only with the particular, but with the concrete as well. What the simile offers, that the general proposition lacks, is *detail*. These two features are connected, since particulars, unlike generalities, possess detail. In moral judgement, for example, what we require is to be able to perceive *details* correctly, and the novel, according to Nussbaum, is an excellent medium for just this kind of detail. On the basis of the arguments given in the preceding paragraphs, then, I claim we can reject the Platonic claim that understanding is general and must be in the form of *episteme*.



## Phantasia and Conviction.

So far, I have tried to allay some of the more persistent worries we may have about rhetoric. To do this, I have appealed to the general difference between belief and “conviction”, and to the account of “phantasia” we can find in Aristotle and the Stoics. In the last section I claimed that art and rhetoric provide us with *concrete* understanding, distinct from general propositions. In this last section I want to say a little more about these points. In particular, there are three questions I will focus on. First, how do the notions of phantasia and the concrete connect? Second, what does conviction amount to, if it isn’t belief? And third, what are the connections between being convinced and being emotionally affected?

Taking the first of these, we may begin by saying that, roughly speaking, *phantasia* are *concrete*. Aristotle’s own use of *phantasia*<sup>96</sup> covers a relatively wide range of phenomena, from visual appearances (eg. the Muller-Lyer illusion) to mental images (thinking of your home town, for example) to the general conceptual schemata under which we have perceptual experience. It has rightly been compared with Wittgenstein’s notion of “seeing-as”<sup>97</sup>. Nevertheless, what each example of the phenomenon shares is that it is *concrete* and *particular*. The phantasia which is the experience of looking at the Muller-Lyer illusion has a concrete content that is *of* a particular group of lines. It is true that beliefs too can be specific and concrete to a degree; I can *believe* that the Muller Lyer illusion appears to people as it does. But this

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<sup>96</sup> For references to secondary literature on Aristotle’s use of *phantasia*, see footnotes below.

<sup>97</sup> See references to Nussbaum, Schofield and Frede, below.

belief, although it *refers* to the details of the appearance, lacks the specific *content* of the experience. This, then, serves to answer our first question.

My second question was; what does conviction amount to if it is not belief? Let us look at some examples. Earlier, I offered Walton's example of the cinema-goer who is frightened of the slime on the screen, even though he does not believe he is threatened or in danger. Further examples *would be*; the phobics who believe neither that their fear is appropriate nor (contrary to Levinson and others) that there *exists* any object that their fear is fear *of*. It might be wondered though, what sense there is in talking of "conviction" in these cases; isn't it just that the fear occurs as a result of exposure to a given stimulus? Is it not, in other words, merely a *causal* relation, making talk of conviction out of place?

Admittedly, there is some oddity in talking of *conviction* in a context other than that of belief; since *epistemic* conviction is the only kind of conviction we usually talk about, it leaves it unclear exactly what we *are* talking about, if not that. In answer to this query, my suggestion is that talk of conviction involves attributing a certain quality to the experience, to the *phantasia*. We might cast around for synonyms for this quality, such as "life-like", or "realistic", or "vivid". However, as I have already claimed these attempts to capture it miss the point since *realism* is not what is at stake. Instead, I suggest that we think of the *emotional response* elicited as itself a criterion of the quality. The reason behind this suggestion is the idea that, for the *phantasia* to *be* convincing, it has to *succeed* in some way, although clearly, not to succeed in producing belief. But in what then would success consist?

Here we can take a leaf from the book of those philosophers like Armstrong who claim that all perception is reducible to belief. I argued above that this view is mistaken. But what Armstrong says about the states I am referring to as *phantasia* is suggestive. Faced with such states, he attempts to analyse them into *dispositions* to believe. So, on looking at the Muller-Lyer illusion, I am *disposed* to believe the illusion; what prevents me is the presence of a *contrary* belief.



This idea has been rightly criticised on the grounds that it gets things the wrong way round; even if I *am* disposed to believe, it must be on the basis of the way things seem, and it is *that*- the visual appearance- which is the content of the experience and which needs analysed. And it cannot be analysed in terms of belief. While accepting this objection, we can concede that Armstrong's suggestion nevertheless captures something about the quality of the appearance, namely that it moves or disposes us *towards* belief, without actually producing it. This quality of experience can be thought of as a kind of conviction, then- it disposes us to believe - but it is distinct from belief.

Let us take another of the examples I gave earlier- the nervous schoolboy. In this case, the schoolboy has the correct belief, and although something suggests to him that it is the right answer, he is tempted *not* to accept it. He is not convinced, he doubts his own knowledge. It might be objected that the problem here is simpler than I suggest; it is that he doesn't really even *believe* that the date is correct. The correct answer comes to mind- as the result of some unknown process- but he rejects it. There is therefore no conflict between belief and conviction. However, while there *might* be such a case as this, equally it might be different. It might be that he does believe it, but is not quite convinced. For instance, sometimes we are not certain if we turned the gas off before leaving the house<sup>98</sup>. In such a case it seems we can *believe* we did, while still entertaining doubts. A lack of certainty, or the presence of doubt should not be taken to indicate an absence of belief.

There is an additional reason for not wanting to tie the idea of conviction too closely to that of belief. In the phobia cases, the *phantasia* are convincing. But whether it is a drawing or a television image that provokes the response, the phobic need not be tempted to believe that there is an existing object of his fear or an existing threat. So here it seems that conviction cannot be cashed out in terms of its belief-disposing tendencies. Perhaps though, this could be doubted. Should we not say that phobics are at least *tempted* to believe that the object of their fear is dangerous? Our inclination to say this however, is

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<sup>98</sup> I owe this example to Mary Haight.

the result of our awareness that experience possesses features relevant to belief which are not however reducible to it. And this is the feature which I am referring to as being “convincing”.

If we accept this picture, we can claim that conviction is a quality of *phantasia* of different sorts. In the Muller-Lyer example it does not lead to belief (when it doesn't) because we have acquired the *contrary* belief (usually) from another source. In some people who are unaware of the illusion it *may* lead directly to the belief. In the case where we *have* the contrary belief, that belief is in tension with the convincing nature of the *phantasia*<sup>99</sup>. In *emotional* cases, the *phantasia* will produce emotion when it is convincing, just as it will produce a convincing appearance in the Muller-Lyer example. In both cases there are additional normative considerations to which these *phantasia* are subject; in the Muller-Lyer example, we decide whether the appearance should be assented to, or believed, and in the emotional case we evaluate the response and decide if it is appropriate or not. In both cases there can be responses we might describe as *akratic*; I might be unable to convince myself the bridge is safe<sup>100</sup>, although that is what I believe, and I may find the racist joke funny although I find this response morally repugnant. This, then, is a tentative account of what “conviction” consists in.

I now turn to my third question, namely the connection between convincing *phantasia* and emotional arousal. This raises the question of how lower-level features of our experience relate to the whole. So far I have talked about a *phantasia*'s being “convincing” as an *overall* property of the experience. But whether it is convincing will depend on lower level properties of the experience. In the phobia example, for instance, some images will produce the response and others will not. But this must be because of the properties of the images.

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<sup>99</sup> By contrast, in the schoolboy example, if the *phantasia* is convincing, he will not *have* doubts.

<sup>100</sup> This was Gosling's example, discussed in chapter four.



Consider an example from Sartre<sup>101</sup>. He is watching the impersonator Franconay on stage; she is impersonating Maurice Chevalier. The act, he says, is completely convincing - although we do not of course *believe* we are watching Maurice Chevalier. Sartre makes an interesting point about this phenomenon; he remarks that we see the impersonator *as* Chevalier, even though we are aware at the same time that we are not watching a tall, thin, grey haired man, but rather, a dark-haired woman of average height and curvaceous figure. Given these discrepancies between the lower level properties (size, shape, colour etc.) of the image of Chevalier and the appearance of Franconay, we might ask how such an image *could* be convincing - why does the discrepancy not jar with us and destroy the illusion? Sartre says simply that we “override” these differences. In fact, we are both aware and yet unaware of them. Aware in the sense that we have *beliefs* about them, but unaware in that they are not part of the appearance, the *phantasia*. We can generalise from this. Only certain features will make an appearance convincing, and equally, only certain features will make it unconvincing. The relationship between the higher level property of being convincing and the lower level properties that must be present is difficult to state, and perhaps cannot be stated<sup>102</sup>. No doubt other impersonators of Chevalier might be closer in physical appearance to him, yet produce less convincing impersonations.

As regards works of fiction, similar general remarks apply. It is difficult to say in advance what the relation is between whether a work is convincing and its more detailed properties. But there can be no doubt that there is such a relation. This is borne out by the following example; in *The Great Tradition*, F.R. Leavis begins his discussion of Joseph Conrad with an analysis of his minor works and less successful novels. A powerful but flawed work in Leavis’

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<sup>101</sup> From *The Psychology of the Imagination* p.57-59.

<sup>102</sup> This might be so, for instance, if the property of being *convincing* is supervenient (or some similar relation) upon lower level features. Sibley, for instance, argues in this way about the impossibility of predicting aesthetic properties on the basis of non-aesthetic ones (“Aesthetic Concepts”, *Philosophical Review* 1959).

opinion is *Heart of Darkness*. Leavis draws attention to certain misuses of language which he feels renders some of the writing hollow. After praising much of the detail of the writing, he comments;

“There are however, places in the *Heart of Darkness* where we become aware of comment as an inter-position, and worse, as an intrusion, at times an exasperating one. Hadn't he, we find ourselves asking, overworked “inscrutable”, “inconceivable”, “unspeakable” and that kind of word already?— Yet still they recur. Is anything added to the oppressive mysteriousness of the Congo by such sentences as—

It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention? “

(*The Great Tradition* p.204)

Leavis' comment that the language comes as an “intrusion” echoes Sartre's comments above. The successful work, the one that convinces, lacks this jarring quality; the higher level appearance or *phantasia* overrides lower level features which might conflict— such as Franconnay's height. Some features *may* intrude, however, and when this occurs the overall effect is ruined. In this respect the *unity* of our experience is relevant to our evaluation of a work's success or failure - the aesthetic experience is a *synthesising* one, as we might put it.

This concludes my consideration of the nature of *convincing* phantasia. In this chapter I have tried to draw together various themes touched on at different points in the overall argument of this thesis, and used them to offer a particular account of the role art may have in the process of emotional education. I shall end with a summary of what I hope these arguments have established.



## Conclusion

In this thesis my starting point has been the two questions (a) what is the nature of emotional states, and (b) why should we think emotional states are valuable. Chapter one offered an account of what emotional states are which depended on a contrast between types of cognitive state. In particular, I claimed that the cognitive component of an emotion is not a *belief* but something that I characterised as a “seeing-as”, or alternatively, in terms of Aristotle’s term *phantasia*.

This account limits what we can credibly say in response to the second question. I have claimed (in chapter two) that the value of emotions should be explained in terms of their *cognitive* contribution. Fortunately - I have claimed- the account of the nature of emotions I offer allows us a way out of a difficulty which arises immediately when we claim that it is the cognitive value of emotion that matters. The problem is that it seems possible to have whatever cognitive component an emotion might possess without having the emotion itself. Chapter two attempted to show why this assumption might be mistaken.

If that conclusion is correct, it follows that those who have not been educated to have the correct emotional response, will be cognitively deficient to some extent. This account of the value of emotion was consistent with Aristotle’s ethical theory, which also ascribes considerable value to emotional states. That theory was elaborated in chapter four. Working out the details of Aristotle’s view involved saying how the education of emotion involves the development of *character*, and how emotion is related to practical reasoning or *phronesis*. In addition, chapter three considered and rejected a variety of arguments to the effect that it is a mistake to ascribe value to emotions- among them Kantian, utilitarian and Stoic positions.

While endorsing Aristotle’s views against those of the Stoics and others, I have however conceded that such an account does not explain the value of all emotion. To explore this issue, I considered, in chapter five, the views of the

Romantics, and in particular focused on the emotion of love. My conclusion was that there is a valid distinction to be made between *emotions* and *passion*.

This account of the value of emotion assumes in addition that the education of emotion is feasible (and desirable- I also considered Nietzsche's objections on this score in chapter six). Chapter six attempts to offer a general account of what such a process might consist in. Above all, I claimed that given the account of emotions suggested here, emotional education must consist in more than the education of belief. As part of this process I have also considered whether there might be a connection between our experience of art works and the development of our emotions (in chapters six and seven). One difficulty arises from the fact that emotional responses to fictions appear to be importantly different to real-life emotions. Furthermore, the process of emotional education requires the establishing of consistent patterns of response- in fact, it requires integrity and character. But responses to fiction seem to lack the features (above all, belief) which seem to be required for this kind of psychological integration. Indeed such emotions threaten to subvert the process of integration by contributing to a process of distancing from real life, and a consequent and disturbing alteration in the nature of our real life emotional experience. I conclude that despite the possibility of this effect, works of fiction can nevertheless contribute to the educational process.

The issue of integration of emotion with the rest of our mental life in addition raises more general issues relevant to psychological explanation. It is, I have claimed, a persistent temptation to construe all cognitive states as belief. It is for this reason that so many writers have simply assumed that if emotions are cognitive then they must involve beliefs. While I have insisted that the putative divorce between reason and emotion is a mistake (emotions are rational), I have also argued that the attempt to picture our cognitive life (including our emotional life) as exhaustively a matter of belief, is another mistake. The Plato of the *Protagoras*, and the Stoics are guilty of this error. In contrast I suggest that we should allow that belief itself can be in conflict with other cognitive states. I introduce this contention in chapter four in



connection with the Stoics, and suggest that there can be akratic cognitive responses (not being *convinced*) which are in conflict with belief, parallel to the way there can be akratic emotional responses, also in conflict with belief. This point was picked up again in chapter eight where the notion of a *convincing phantasia* was explored, and used to reject some current attitudes (eg. Levinson's) towards the Paradox of Fiction. I also claimed that the concept was relevant to our experience of art works and works of rhetoric.

Two other issues were then explored through this distinction between beliefs and other cognitive states. The first was the application of the term "rational" to actions and responses. One construal of this term ties it exclusively to *belief*; but on this model, I argue, we are forced to regard much of our emotional lives as irrational or arational (chapter eight). However, I argue that we should reject this "belief/desire" psychology and allow that rationality has a wider application. This wider application, I claim, still employs the normative contrasts we associate with rationality.

The same picture of human psychology which produces this mistaken account of rationality also produces a mistaken picture of *understanding*. In particular, it emphasises the notions of *inference* and *interpretation* and construes all understanding as *propositional*. This picture is rejected in chapter three, through a consideration of the work of Wittgenstein. Once we reject this account, we are, I claim, in a better position to see that the same mistakes also lead to mistaken accounts of emotion, of the sort discussed in chapters one and eight.

Chapter eight employs the distinction between beliefs and other cognitive states to show how works of fiction might contribute to our understanding. The Platonic assumption that they cannot, turns out, I contend, to assume the very picture of understanding which was rejected in earlier chapters. I also attempt to show that emotional responses can be a form of understanding.

Attempting to answer my initial two questions about the nature and value of emotional states, therefore, quickly leads to more general issues concerning psychological explanation, and our taxonomy of the mental, and these in turn are connected to still wider normative issues such as the nature of rationality.

In this respect, while some broad consensus now exists amongst philosophers on certain issues - everyone now rejects Humean and Cartesian accounts of the emotions, for instance - there remains substantial disagreement not only over the details of the correct account, but also over the many contiguous questions upon which the issue bears - how wide a vocabulary we require for psychological explanation, what we take the nature of understanding and rationality to be, and what room we allow for the imagination, are issues which will both influence the account of the emotions which we will end up with, and which will themselves be evaluated in the light of that account.

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