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Understanding Emotions

Mind and Morals
edited by Peter Goldie
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There has recently been something of a resurgence of interest in the emotions within analytic philosophy, and Peter Goldie's collection is a welcome contribution to this movement. It comprises seven papers arising from a conference at the University of London's School of Advanced Studies, as well as a lengthy introductory article. As the subtitle suggests, these range across a number of areas in philosophy, primarily epistemology, mind and ethics. There is no specific issue focused upon; instead, the collection is suggestive of a philosophical tradition rediscovering a neglected phenomenon. The collection is to be commended: it raises the profile of the emotions in Anglo-American analytic philosophy, and succeeds in integrating the emotions into live debates in mind and ethics.

This book will not be for everyone. Many of the papers will seem rather dry to those unfamiliar with analytic philosophy and its longstanding neglect of the emotions. In a similar way, anyone hoping for a systematic account of the emotions will be disappointed; a number of the contributions spend little time on the emotions, focusing rather on their relevance to issues within the analytic tradition. It is not the aim of the book to provide the reader with an easy way into recent analytic work—a better introduction would be Peter Goldie's other recent book, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford 2000).

Given the range of issues represented here, it is worthwhile outlining each of the papers. This should serve to demonstrate that most readers should find at least something of interest, even if one may not wish to spend time on all of the papers.

The introduction, by Peter Goldie and Finn Spicer, is helpful, but is also something of a missed opportunity. It does provide a good account of the recent history of the emotions within the analytical tradition, and helpfully outlines the reasons why they have been sidelined. Prominent amongst these is the thought that the emotions stand in the way of rational deliberation—they "interfere with the workings of reason guided action", as Barry C. Smith puts it in his contribution (p. 112). Whether this belief is justified is discussed in a number of the following papers, notably those by Morton and Stocker. The introduction also provides a summary of some of the recent literature in philosophy and elsewhere, this constituting a useful background to the various discussions.

Nevertheless, one might have hoped for more. The account of the geography of the area is somewhat brief, and not as much time is spent locating the various contributions as could have been. One reason for this is that the introduction's authors appear to have an agenda of their own. Rather than just providing a background for the following papers, they advocate a particular approach under which "we can call the emotion a *substance*" (p. 4). This approach does not feature in any of the

subsequent discussions, and appears as little more than a thumbnail sketch here. It might have been profitably set aside for detailed discussion elsewhere.

Another problem—albeit an understandable one—concerns the lack of any clear account of which mental and behavioural states or dispositions are to count as emotions. Examples of emotions range from intellectual curiousity to courage and fear, with little to explain what counts and what does not (for example, what is merely a sensation, or a behavioural disposition). Michael Stocker notes that there is disagreement concerning what counts as an emotion, and calls this an uninteresting matter of classification (p. 68). While there is some truth to this, in a book focusing on the emotions we might expect a clearer picture of the subject matter to emerge.

Moving on to the individual contributions, Bill Brewer is concerned with the connection between the experience of emotion and the behaviour typical of emotional states. This is related to a particular conceptual problem of other minds: given that one's being in an emotional state is detected and possibly constituted by one's subjective experiential state, how do we make sense of the ascription of such emotional states to others?

Part of the answer comes by noting the central role of behaviour here. Brewer draws upon William James' account of emotional experience, and attempts to address a defect that he finds there. James suggested that emotional experience is simply the experience of the bodily changes typical of the emotional state. To feel fear, for example, is just to experience a heightened pulse, muscular contraction caused by the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline into your bloodstream, and so on. Brewer concurs with this aspect of James' account, but argues that the account is inadequate as it stands, due to the fact that it fails to explain the fact that emotions can be directed towards a particular object. One does not just feel afraid—one feels afraid of the stranger approaching in the unlit alley.

Brewer's aim, then, is to provide an account of emotional experience that ascribes a suitable role to behaviour, allows for the intensional aspect of the experience, and avoids the conceptual problem of other minds noted above. He attempts this by giving an account that ascribes a central role to an object, and by tying this object to one's behaviour:

> (F1) to be frightening is to be *thus*; and
> (F2) experiences of being afraid are precisely those which present something in a certain light, as frightening, that is, as being thus,
> where the referent of the behavioural demonstrative figuring in (F1) is the property, roughly speaking, of eliciting certain behaviour in the subject (p. 29)

Daniel Hutto's paper is, to a large extent, a response to Brewer's. He argues that Brewer's account falls foul of the conceptual problem of other minds, as it "remains unhelpfully tied to an individualistic model of concept learning" (p. 40). The worry is that Brewer gives an account of concept acquisition that fails to unite the experiential and behavioural aspects of emotional concepts in the way necessary for one to make sense of the idea that another can be in the same emotional state as oneself.

In response to this, Hutto provides an alternative account of concept learning based on Donald Davidson's account of triangulation. His account is centred on the idea that

we must share with others of our species an ability to attend preconceptually to features of the world and recognise other similar beings as doing the same. This intersubjective attending can act as the common ground which enables us to acquire emotion concepts that can be ascribed to others as well as oneself.

Hutto's paper will be of significant value and interest to those interested in epistemological issues surrounding the acquisition of concepts, but may be of less interest to those concerned solely with the emotions. There is surprisingly little mention of these in the paper, and this, along with the its location early in the book, will not help to endear the book to anyone hostile to (or sceptical of) the analytic tradition. Nevertheless, those in this situation should persevere, as the remaining papers merit attention.

The next contribution, from Adam Morton, moves to the area of ethics, and is a dialogue between two characters, Adam and Eve. The former character (presumably the voice of the author) argues against seeing the emotions as a source of self-knowledge. Drawing upon Ronald de Sousa's work, the paper suggests that "to feel an emotion is to see oneself as occupying a particular role in a particular kind of story" (p. 56). Seeing oneself "through the clouding influence of emotional thinking" in this way is potentially misleading; the emotions are more likely to obscure the facts of one's situation than to reveal them.

As should be clear, Morton (or, at least, his character 'Adam'), concurs with the recent historical trend of seeing the emotions as standing in the way of rational thought (as mentioned above). When under the influence of an emotion, one is inclined to see events from a 'centred' perspective—such thought and experience lacks an objectivity or impartiality that is desirable and, in Morton's account, related to the possession of virtue.

The dialogue form employed here might similarly be thought to stand in the way of critical engagement. Its value is not obvious, and it serves primarily to make Morton's arguments rather more opaque than they might otherwise have been.

Michael Stocker's contribution takes an opposing line to Morton's. The paper is concerned with a number of interrelated issues concerning emotions and values. The largest part of the discussion relates to issues in moral epistemology, and argues for the thought that emotions constitute a central route by which we come to detect and recognise value. This thought, familiar within the Aristotelian tradition, stands in direct contrast to Morton's thesis, as outlined above.

In support of the claim that the emotions play a key role in the evaluative judgements we make, Stocker cites a wealth of empirical evidence drawn from psychology and psychoanalysis. In this context, he draws the reader's attention to an interesting range of cases in which, it is suggested, a subject's emotional state has a debilitating effect on his/her ability to assess the situation, or to understand him/herself or others.

> A woman who because of grandiosity feels responsible for the well-being of the entire family, to such an extent that she feels guilty for all unhappiness suffered by her children (p. 71)

Such claims are not, of course, uncontroversial, but Stocker makes a good case for the general claim.

A further theme is that emotions are not only a central epistemic route to value, but also can be partly constitutive of value. A lack of emotion can, in some instances, be a moral fault, as when one fails to feel remorse in an appropriate situation. Presumably, the converse can also be true—feeling excessively emotional might be blameworthy, for example when one is required to be objective or clinical in one's opinions (jury service might provide one example here).

Remaining in the moral arena, Simon Blackburn's paper asks 'How Emotional is the Virtuous Person?' The paper concerns the debate between rationalists, who hold that to have a reason for something involves the apprehension of a reason, and expressivists, who hold that it is to have an "attitude or passion akin to desire" (p. 82).

Focusing on desire, Blackburn draws upon a passage from Augustine, and asks

> Does the pull of the will and of love get reflected by the belief that some things need doing? Or does reason require us to believe that some things need doing … and *thereby* exert rational control over the direction that the pull and the will of love takes? (p. 89)

Blackburn can be seen as rejecting both positions represented by Morton and Stocker above. Accounts of the kind endorsed by Morton generally hold that emotions prevent one apprehending reasons - they prevent the kind of cool, detached apprehension of the facts traditionally favoured by the post-Cartesian rationalist. Stocker, on the other hand, holds that emotions are ways of apprehending reasons. Against both of these, Blackburn rejects the rationalist assumption in favour of the expressivist position. He holds that to have a reason is not to apprehend that something is the case, but rather to desire something. To take this line is to give a positive answer to the first question asked above and a negative answer to the second.

Although Blackburn's paper is not focused on the emotions, it does provide an answer to the titular question. Given that on the expressivist account, to have a reason to do *x* is just to desire that *x*, the virtuous person must have desires. In fact, the virtuous person is "exactly as emotional as the rest of us" (p. 95). The difference lies in the fact that the desires of the virtuous are aimed at the correct targets.

Peter Goldie's paper marks a return to epistemological territory with a discussion of our ability to predict and explain the emotional states and responses of others. He argues that the imagination can have little role to play in this area—identifying how someone will react to an action is not a matter of imaginative identification with that person. Simulation, while potentially useful as a predictive and explanatory tool for other unemotional behaviour, does not play a central role with respect to the emotional states of others. This is because individuals' emotional responses vary wildly, and any attempt to put oneself in the shoes of another is in danger of making an unjust presupposition of identity concerning the range of emotional responses in the two cases.

Instead, it is argued that one must have a "body of information" about how people generally act, as well as information about the subject's particular character. The more

information available here, the more likely that one will be able to predict the subject's emotional responses. This body of information is not, it should be noted, a *theory*—for familiar reasons, Goldie rejects the idea that there can be laws of human behaviour as there are scientific laws. Goldie, then, might be expected to reject the suggestion that he holds a theory-theory of emotional understanding, if (the first) 'theory' is read in this scientistic way.

Goldie does allow some role for the imagination, though. He argues that "acentral imagining"—imagining, that is, from no point of view—can allow us to construct predictive narratives about the behaviour of others. Such imagining employs the body of information, and is can be seen as a means of applying this information on Goldie's account.

The concluding paper, by Barry C. Smith, is again epistemological in focus. He draws our attention to the failure on the part of most contemporary theories of folk psychology to leave any explanatory space whatsoever for the emotions. He argues for a place for the emotions in rational psychology, and justifies this by noting the place that the emotions have in the day-to-day judging of others. Smith also claims that we cannot treat emotions as a particular variety of sensation; although certain emotional states (such as joy) might be predominantly sensational, there are others that appear to have a more dispositional nature.

The second half of Smith's paper comprises a discussion of the range of emotional phenomena and a suggestion to the effect that Goldie fails to grant a sufficient place to one's own emotions in our understanding of the emotional states of others. The roles played by the emotions in understanding oneself, others, and the world are many and varied, and if we are to give any systematic account of these we must distinguish between those emotions which are stable over time and the emotional outbursts that may well restrict rational deliberation.

As the preceding will hopefully have suggested, this volume is a worthwhile contribution to the growing literature on the emotions. The disparate nature of the papers should serve to demonstrate the richness of the emotions as a topic of study, and well as to indicate the amount of work still needing doing within Anglo-American philosophy. I would expect this book to be of real influence in directing future work within this area.