



Emotion

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Abstract

After many years of neglect, philosophers are increasingly turning their attention to the emotions, and recently we have seen a number of different accounts of emotion. In this article, we will first consider what facts an account of emotion needs to accommodate if it is going to be acceptable. Having done that, we will then consider some of the leading accounts and see how they fare in accommodating the facts. Two things in particular will emerge. First, an adequate account of emotion cannot be provided without taking into account a wide range of issues in philosophy of mind that extend beyond the emotions in particular. Secondly, the diversity of emotional phenomena makes it especially hard to provide anything like a *comprehensive* account of emotion; philosophers not only disagree over what are the essential properties of emotion, but also over what are central cases.

What Do We Need from an Account of Emotion?

These are some of the facts that an account of emotion needs to accommodate.

Diversity. Whatever else emotions are, they are diverse – particularly so when compared with other mental state types such as belief, desire or intention (although these too are more diverse than is often acknowledged). This diversity arises across a range of different dimensions, some of which are as follows:

- Diversity in duration. On this dimension, emotions range from short-term emotional reactions such as surprise at the sudden and unexpected noise behind you, to longer-term emotions such as enduring love of your children or parents. The former is best understood as an emotional episode or experience, and the latter as an emotional disposition, but we typically use the term ‘emotion’ for both episode and disposition.
- Diversity in focus. Emotions range from the highly focused contempt for your neighbour’s nosiness about the state of your garden, to a general, more mood-like feeling of *Weltschmerz* or despair at the way the world is.
- Diversity in complexity. At one extreme, emotions can be very complex psychological states: one can feel guilty that one felt delight at making

fun of her embarrassment on hearing his somewhat off-colour joke. At the other extreme, emotions can be quite simple: surprise at the sudden noise. Duration, focus and complexity should not be confused.

- Diversity in physical manifestation. At one extreme on this dimension, emotions are manifestly highly physical; for example, disgust at the rotting corpse involves such conditions as rising bile in the mouth; fear of the skidding truck involves rushes of adrenalin, a pumping heart, sweaty palms and so on. At the other extreme, one can have a very cerebral anger at the erosion of civil liberties in the face of threats from terrorism, and here there *seems* to be no observable physical manifestation.
- Diversity in degree of consciousness. Diversity in consciousness arises across at least four different dimensions. First, emotions range from the very conscious feeling of disgust at the rotting corpse, to an unconscious envy in the Freudian sense, perhaps even repressed, of your younger brother's achievements. Emotions are also diverse, not on the conscious-unconscious range (in the Freudian sense of unconscious), but on the conscious-non-conscious range: some of our emotional responses seem to take place at a speed that excludes the possibility of conscious processing (such as the immediate response to a disgusting stimulus, or to a sudden unexpected noise); at the other extreme some emotional responses seem almost a matter of conscious deliberation and *choice* (such as when you ask yourself whether it would be morally right for you to be angry about some difficult question of justice). Thirdly, there is the disposition-episode distinction mentioned above: emotional dispositions are arguably not conscious; emotional episodes are arguably conscious. However, and this is the fourth kind of diversity of consciousness, it is arguably not necessary that one be reflectively conscious of an emotional episode – feeling surprised, for example, but not aware *that* you are feeling surprised.
- Diversity in degree of development. On this dimension, emotions range from a feeling of an emotion simmering, or boiling up, such as a slowly growing irritation at your fellow diner's table manners, to a 'full-on', now boiling, fury at the sight of someone slapping his child for dropping her ice-cream, to a residual feeling of grumpiness after an outburst of anger.
- Diversity in degree of action-connectedness. Some emotions seem very directly connected to action or to action tendency: your fear of the snake on the path in front of you will give rise to immediate, perhaps uncontrollable, actions. Other emotions seem to have no such direct connection, such as intellectual emotions and aesthetic emotions.

Evolution. Our emotions seem, at least in many cases, to be adaptive: to improve our evolutionary fitness (Cosmides and Tooby). This idea is often combined with the idea that such emotions are universal or pan-cultural, and are shared, at least in some elements, with other animals.

Much work has been done in this area, following on from the fascinating work of Charles Darwin. Paul Ekman and others have argued that only some emotions fall into this category; these are usually called *basic emotions*, or sometimes *affect programs* (Ekman; Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are*; 'Is Emotion a Natural Kind?'). Familiar examples are affect program fear, anger, disgust, happiness, sadness and surprise. These emotions often (or even perhaps always) involve characteristic bodily changes and changes to the autonomic nervous system such as changes in heart rate, in pulse rate, sweating and so on, as well as characteristic facial expression, which have been particularly studied by Ekman (Ekman and Friesen). An account of emotion ought to be able to show why some, and not all, of what we intuitively call emotions are of this kind, and why some, but not all, are adaptive. In this context, Paul Griffiths (*What Emotions Really Are*; 'Is Emotion a Natural Kind?') has argued that the wide notion of emotion does not pick out a natural kind, and is of little or no use as a psychological category.

Beasts and babies. Many philosophers and psychologists argue that certain non-human creatures, such as dogs and chimps, are capable of emotion, as are babies, and that an acceptable account of emotion must accommodate this fact (Deigh, 'Cognitivism'; 'Primitive Emotions'). Rats show fear (leDoux), chimps show sympathy (de Waal and Luttrell) and babies show rage (Watson). The evolutionary considerations just mentioned seem to lend some support to this. An account of emotion that seeks to accommodate emotions in babies and across other species will need to consider how beasts and babies, arguably without language, can possess emotions, particularly those with the duration, focus and complexity with which adult humans are familiar.

Intentionality. Intentionality is the property that the mind has of being directed onto things (Crane, 'Intentionality'; 'Intentional Structure'; Searle). Emotions do seem to be intentional: your surprise is *at* the sudden noise; your fear is *of* the dog, your love is *of* your parents, you are angry *that* civil liberties are being eroded. These things (taking the notion of 'thing' suitably widely) are the *objects* of your emotion: the noise, the dog, your parents, the fact that civil liberties are being eroded. Arguably, even with a mood-like feeling of *Weltschmerz* there is an intentional object, namely (roughly speaking) the world (Crane 'Intentionality'; Goldie, *Emotions*). And arguably emotional dispositions are intentional too, even if they are not themselves part of the content of experience (Wollheim). So we need an account of emotion that accommodates their intentionality. And this account must show that the intentional object of an emotion need not be its cause: your irritability might be caused by drinking too much coffee, but it is your partner's way of buttering the toast that is the object of your irritation. It is also very important here not to confuse the question of the intentionality of emotion with four other closely connected questions that one might also ask about the content of emotions.

One is whether the objects of emotion can be propositional or non-propositional or both; you might be in despair *that* you are getting so frail, and here the object of your emotion is propositional (Schroeder); in contrast your love of your partner is surely not propositional nor is it reducible to a series of propositional attitudes (but see Newton-Smith). A second question is whether emotions (some or all) have what are called *formal objects* which make the emotion intelligible (Kenny; de Sousa): for example, the formal object of disgust is the disgusting, and of fear the frightening. A third question is whether emotional contents (the way in which the intentionality or aboutness of emotions is captured) are conceptual or non-conceptual (Toribio). And a fourth question, often confused with the third, is whether emotional contents are 'effable' or ineffable. For example, the smell of sulphur dioxide may be ineffable, or not communicable in words, but it does not follow from this alone that it is non-conceptual. Nor, incidentally, does it follow that it is incommunicable – all I need to do is to give you a rotten egg to smell. These issues concerned with the intentionality of emotion will connect in important ways to the question of emotion in beasts and babies: perhaps one might be attracted to an account of emotion that allows emotional intentionality in these creatures, but not perhaps emotions which are propositional or conceptual, at least in some senses of 'conceptual'.

Feelings and phenomenology. Here too commitments elsewhere in philosophy of mind will be highly relevant. Unlike certain types of mental states, such as belief perhaps, emotional experience has a characteristic phenomenology; there is *something that it is like* to be afraid and to be angry (Nagel; Kriegal). We need an account of emotion that will properly locate these feelings, and establish answers to a range of questions: whether or not these feelings are necessary for emotion (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*); whether or not they are sufficient to distinguish emotions one from another (Schachter and Singer); whether or not the notion of 'valence' is sufficient to characterise the phenomenology of emotion (Russell); whether or not these feelings are intentional (Crane 'Intentionality'; 'Intentional Structure'); and whether or not they can be directed towards things other than the body (Goldie, *Emotions*; 'Emotion, Feeling, and Knowledge'). Answers to these questions will have to draw on wider questions of consciousness, including those discussed earlier.

Importance. Your emotions are about things that matter to you, that you care about or value (Roberts, 'What an Emotion is'; *Emotions*; Mulligan; Helm). You *care* about the well-being of your parents, the erosion of civil liberties, the ill-treatment of the innocent child. So emotions about things seem to be, in this respect, more than just *thoughts* or *beliefs* about things. You might believe that Jimmy Jones has won the Under Sixteen School Swimming Competition, but for you to be proud that he has won it, you need to care about it, having some kind of connection with Jimmy Jones (perhaps he is your kid brother, or, like you, he is asthmatic), and thinking

that what he has done is of some merit (Hume; Davidson). It is only because of this that it matters to you that Jimmy has won (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*). And yet it should be noted that even with these further thoughts in place, envy is possible rather than pride – see *Rationality* below. So it would seem that an account of emotion has to find a place for a range of connections between the emotion and what you care for and value. At least this would seem to be so in respect of some of the more complex emotions such as pride and envy, if not in respect of surprise.

Rationality. Following on from the last point, many of our emotions seem to stand in rational relations to other psychological states. If you feel proud of Jimmy's winning, it is because you believe that it was a real achievement and because you believe that he is your kid brother, and these 'because's' are not (just) causal because's (Bennett). As it is often said, the beliefs *provide reasons for or justify* the emotion (de Sousa; Kenny; Taylor). Even with less complex emotions (surprise may be an exception here; see Robinson, 'Startle'), there is still this justifying relation: you are afraid of the dog because you think it might bite you. And if you come to realise that it is just a harmless pooch, then your fear will go away. But there's the rub; the fear might not go away. So we need an account of emotion which will reveal its normative rational relations with other states, and which will explain why, on some occasions, these relations fail to hold; your fear of what you now realise to be the harmless pooch *ought* to go away, but it might not. If it does not, then you are in some sense conflicted. In fact there are, at least, two kinds of conflict that it is important to keep apart. First, there is conflict between an emotion and a token of another type of mental state: as we have just seen, there can be conflict between a belief and an emotion. And secondly, there is the possibility of ambivalent emotions – that is to say, where the conflict arises between two token of emotion, two token of that one type of mental state; for example, one might be both pleased and displeased, both proud and envious, that Jimmy has won the swimming competition (Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons*; 'Emotions').

Connection to action. Emotions seem to motivate us to do things. If you are afraid of the dog, you will take avoiding action of some kind – you run away 'out of fear'; you hide 'in terror'. To accommodate this, an account of emotion will need to explain this connection to action. (See Frijda on emotions as action tendencies; see Marnett, following on from Damasio, for the claim that emotion is necessary for motivation.) It will also need to explain whether emotions motivate directly, or whether they only motivate via some other kind of motivating state, such as desire (Marks). In general, we need an account of emotion that will explain its motivating power.

Responsibility for emotion. Intuitively, emotions are passive, and often seem to overcome us, sometimes in spite of our efforts. These considerations

suggest that we cannot be directly responsible for our emotions, in the way that we are directly responsible for our actions (Fischer and Ravizza). It would seem absurd to hold someone responsible for being surprised at a sudden noise. However, consideration of other examples might suggest otherwise: if I feel a deep loathing of foreigners, I might reasonably be thought to be directly responsible for this, just as much as I am for the actions that I do which are expressive of that loathing (Adams; Goldie, *On Personality*). Moreover, if some of our emotions reveal our deepest concerns, and are integral to our autonomy (Helm; Tappolet), we would need to explain how this could be reconciled with our not being responsible for them.

What Accounts Have Been Given of Emotion?

It is no easy task to give a unitary account of emotion that will accommodate all the facts about emotion that we have just considered. An examination of some of the accounts of emotion currently on offer will quickly reveal that most (or even all) of them put emphasis in one place rather than another, and accordingly fail to be completely satisfactory. Let us consider just three philosophical accounts of emotion that are currently being argued for; of course there are others too, as the literature will attest.

NON-COGNITIVE FEELING THEORIES

These kinds of theories find their recent roots in the work of William James. According to James, emotions are just the feeling of certain bodily changes as a result of perception of some fact; as James most famously put it, 'our feelings of the changes as they occur *is* the emotion' (190). This kind of theory has proved very resilient with psychologists, in spite of a number of challenges, including experiments designed to show that feelings of bodily changes are not sufficient to individuate emotions (Schachter and Singer). And recently, non-cognitive feeling theories have seen a resurgence amongst philosophers, often influenced by the neo-Jamesian work of the neuroscientist Anthony Damasio. One such theory, developed by Jesse Prinz (*Gut Reactions*; 'Embodied Emotions'), seeks to integrate a Jamesian-Damasio feeling theory with appraisal theory (Lazarus; cf. Scherer). According to this view, emotions are valenced embodied appraisals: emotional states do not just 'register' bodily changes, as James claimed; by doing this, they also represent certain appraisals or 'core relational themes', such as 'a demeaning offense against me and mine' for anger. Another non-cognitive theory which has its roots in James is that of Jenefer Robinson ('Emotion'; *Deeper than Reason*); according to her, two things are necessary for an emotional process: a non-cognitive affective appraisal, and certain physiological responses, which might or

might not be felt (a disagreement with James at this point). Both theories can be classified as non-cognitive, although they operate with different senses of that slippery term (see also Delancey). For Robinson, the term 'non-cognitive' simply means non-conscious and caused independently of higher cognitive processing in the neo-cortex; so what she calls 'cognitive monitoring', although often present, is not a necessary part of an emotion process. For Prinz, non-cognitivism is a denial that emotions 'involve cognitions essentially', where cognitions are 'states containing representations that are under organismic control' ('Emotion' 49), although Prinz too allows that some emotional experiences can have cognitions as (partial) causes. Both theories, then, claim to be able to accommodate the higher-level, conscious thought that can be involved in emotion whilst denying its necessity, but they perhaps more readily accommodate the immediacy and passivity characteristic of short-term emotional responses such as fear of the snake, rather than the more cerebral intellectual emotions that can be part of mature human experience (Stocker, 'Psychic Feelings'; 'Some Considerations'). In this respect it is noteworthy that both theorists are particularly struck by the experiments of Robert Zajonc ('On the Primacy of Affect'; 'Evidence'), which claim to show that affect can occur prior to, and without, cognition.

COGNITIVE THEORIES

Cognitive theories of emotion, one might think, tend in the other direction, better suited to complex emotions such as guilt, jealousy and narcissism (Pugmire), and to intellectual emotions (Stocker, 'Psychic Feelings'; 'Some Considerations'), rather than to surprise and fear. Often finding their roots in Aristotle and the Stoics, cognitivists have argued that emotions are to be identified with judgements. Robert Solomon, whilst insisting on his original claim (*Passions*) that emotions are judgements, in recent years ('Emotions, Thoughts and Feelings') has put forward a more nuanced view which responds to what he has called the 'standard objection' to cognitivism, the idea that a judgement that something is fearsome can occur with or without emotion, so judgement cannot be identified with emotion. Emotional judgements, he has added in his recent work, are typically 'spontaneous', 'pre-reflective', 'self-involved', 'essentially tied to desires' and can include 'judgements of the body'. Solomon, here drawing on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, has also argued ('Emotions and Choice') that we choose our emotions, which he relates closely to the idea that we are responsible for our emotions. Martha Nussbaum (*Upheavals of Thought*; 'Emotions') also holds that emotions are a kind of judgement: 'emotions are appraisals or value judgments, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing' (*Upheavals of Thought* 4). She specifically rejects the idea that there are any essential non-cognitive

elements to emotion; so far as feelings are concerned, 'the plasticity and variability of people . . . prevents us from plugging the feeling into the definition as an absolutely necessary element' (60). Nussbaum discusses the work of Zajonc, but is not troubled by it, because she understands him as insisting that emotions do necessarily involve evaluations; although she does accept that an account of emotional judgement must be sufficiently open to accommodate creatures without language – beasts and babies. Other examples of cognitive theories, differing in their details, can be found in Ben-Ze'ev (*Subtlety*; 'Emotion'), Lyons, Rorty, Greenspan (*Emotions and Reasons*) and Marks.

PERCEPTUAL THEORIES

In their essence, perceptual theories of emotion either identify emotions with perceptions or with a particular kind of perception (Roberts, *Emotions*), or they claim that emotions are to be understood as analogous to perception or as ways of seeing (see de Sousa, especially his excellent discussion of paradigm scenarios). Perceptual theories are best understood as a development out of cognitivism; they claim to get the benefits of cognitive theories, including in particular their world-directed intentionality, without the disadvantages. (Prinz's theory is a perceptual theory, but it is best thought of as a development out of James's feeling theory rather than as a development out of cognitivism.) One particularly forceful argument against cognitive theories that identify emotion with judgement is that they cannot explain the fact of emotional conflict: how it is possible for emotions to conflict with judgement, as one might be frightened of a mouse whilst believing it not to be dangerous. Perceptual theories hold that this is no more puzzling than the possibility that the content of our perceptions might conflict with the content of our judgement, as one might, in the Müller-Lyer illusion, judge the lines to be of the same length whilst seeing them as being of different lengths. Secondly, perceptual theories make room for the possibility that emotions might not have contents that are propositional, just as perceptions (such as seeing the bottle in front of you) can be non-propositional. And thirdly, perceptual theories can accommodate the phenomenology of emotional experience, drawing on accounts of the phenomenology of perception. But there are challenges for those who identify emotion with perception, rather than just drawing an analogy between emotion and perception. The first challenge is to identify precisely what is special about *emotional* perceptions, what it is that marks them out from other kinds of perception. The second challenge is to say something about the connections between emotional perception and other aspects of emotional experience which are intuitively thought to be part of an emotion – bodily changes and motivations, for example – and to do this without losing the identity of emotion and perception (Döring). Finally, the identification of emotion with perception

seems to fly in the face of Bishop Butler's wise dictum, that everything is what it is and not another thing.

Conclusion

There remains much work to be done in the philosophy of emotion. This entry has been concerned only with issues in philosophy of mind, but there are many further fascinating areas of emotion research in relation to ethics, to aesthetics, and to the philosophy of value generally, as well as to much recent work in empirical psychology.

Short Biography

Peter Goldie is The Samuel Hall Chair and Head of Philosophy at The University of Manchester. Before moving to Manchester, he was Reader in Philosophy at King's College London, and prior to that a Lecturer at Magdalen College Oxford. His main philosophical interests are in the philosophy of mind, ethics and aesthetics, and particularly in questions concerning value and how the mind engages with value. He is the author of two monographs, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) and *On Personality* (London: Routledge, 2004). He is editor of *Understanding Emotions: Mind and Morals* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002) and co-editor of *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). He is co-writing for Routledge a book on conceptual art, and is planning a book on narrative for Oxford University Press. Professor Goldie is involved in two AHRC projects in aesthetics, and in HUMAINE, a major EU Network of Excellence Research Project into human-machine emotional interactions.

Note

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