

Emotions about Emotions

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of metaemotions (emotions about emotions), showing their undeniable existence and how they are a critical and essential part of emotion life. The article begins by placing reflexivity of emotions within the general reflexivity of human beings. Then, the article presents the literature on metaemotion, showing some of the problems that surround them, which ultimately will lead to ask if the concept of metaemotion is really necessary. The second part of the article argues for the usefulness of the concept, pointing out its role in establishing distinctions among emotional states as well as further clarifying the nature of emotion, and concludes on pointing out some of the directions for future research on metaemotions.

Keywords

education of emotion, emotional valence, metaemotion, reflexivity

This article argues for the necessity of considering metaemotions for a complete emotion theory. In an article entitled “Emotion” (Goldie, 2007), Peter Goldie lists the facts that a theory of emotion needs to accommodate if it is going to be acceptable. Goldie writes that an account of emotion needs to accommodate the diversity of emotions; how to fit within the evolutionary story; what the difference is between human emotions and the feelings of other nonhuman animals; how to understand emotions’ intentionality; the specificity of emotions’ phenomenology and their importance, their rationality, their relations to other psychological states, their connection to action; and, finally, our responsibility for our emotions. And, as Goldie writes, it is not an easy task to provide such a theory of emotion (Goldie, 2007, p. 933). My proposal is that a further requirement should be asked of an account of emotion, namely that it should explain metaemotions.

When emotions are about emotions they are layered instead of sequential (Pugmire, 2005, p. 174). For instance, when someone is sad about their jealousy their sadness is a metaemotion. Or, to give another example, when someone is happy about feeling happy this person has a first-order emotion—joy about something that happened to her, and a second-order emotion—joy about feeling joy.

The emotion and the metaemotion can be simultaneously felt or not. When emotions are sequential one emotion follows

another, such as when I am jealous of my brother and then I am sad about losing my job. But when emotions are layered and the emotions are about other emotions, such as when sadness is about the jealousy, the metaemotion does not have to appear immediately upon the experience of the first-order emotion. It is possible, for instance, to imagine that one feels sad about their jealousy after the strike of jealousy has phenomenologically disappeared. Though when emotion and metaemotion are simultaneous, their phenomenology intertwines, for example, when the feeling of being happy because one is happy reinforces the initial phenomenological state of happiness.

Though the existence of metaemotions¹ is undeniable, their impact has not been totally explored and literature upon the subject is still scarce. This article discusses metaemotions in order to establish them as an important part of emotion theory, ultimately arguing for their crucial importance. The article begins by placing reflexivity of emotions within the general reflexivity of human beings. Then, the article reviews some of the problems that surround metaemotions, raising the question of whether the concept of metaemotion is really necessary. The second part of the article argues for the usefulness of the concept, pointing out its role in establishing distinctions among emotional states as well as further clarifying the nature of emotion, and concludes on pointing out some of the directions for future research on metaemotions.

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The Impact of Reflexivity

Metaemotions cannot be handled as a special case of emotion because reflexivity modifies the nature of our emotional world. As Rosenberg has shown, “human reflexivity transforms the nature of emotions radically” (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 3) because reflexive processes can be identified in virtually every important aspect of human emotions. In “Reflexivity and Emotions,” Rosenberg defines reflexivity as the process that happens when someone or something acts back upon itself, and further explains that this ability is socially grounded. Rosenberg writes,

Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902) showed clearly that reflexivity among human beings is rooted in the social process, particularly the process of taking the role of the other and of seeing the self from the other’s perspective. As a result of this process, the organism develops an awareness of self. (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 3)

In this article Rosenberg concludes that it is reflexivity that sets human emotions apart from the emotions of other species because “[a]s a result of social interaction and communication, the human being comes to take itself as the object of its own cognitive and agentive processes” (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 11). Given the social sphere, Rosenberg argues, human beings detach themselves from the many elements that constitute the self of a person, including some elements of great importance for emotions. Reflexivity has a crucial impact on emotions because humans reflect on emotions, endeavour to grasp their nature, and attempt to control both their displays and the emotional experiences themselves. Thus he concludes,

Reflexivity is thus a central feature of emotional identification, emotional display, and emotional experience. If we are to do justice to the nature of emotion, I believe that it is essential to give careful consideration to these reflexive processes in human beings. (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 11)

Though Rosenberg never refers to reflexive emotions, he places reflexivity as a central feature of several emotional processes. By identifying the extensive influence of the fact that we are reflexive creatures, he opens the possibility that reflexivity is also a trait of emotions.²

Metaemotions

There may be different ways in which reflexivity of emotion occurs, but for the sake of clarity let’s say that we have reflexive emotions when we have an emotion about an emotion. The metaemotion may be the same as the first-order emotion, as when someone is happy about being happy, or different from the first-order emotion, as when someone is sad about being jealous.

The first difficulty of considering metaemotions is that it may be hard to clearly distinguish the first order from the second order. In an article entitled “The Pleasures of Tragedy,” Susan Feagin describes this difficulty by stating that both in ordinary and aesthetic contexts it is difficult to distinguish between emotions and metaemotions, because we use the same words to describe both types of emotional response (Feagin,

1995, p. 208). Nevertheless, she concludes that the fact “[t]hat two things being distinguished cannot be infallibly distinguished, and that there are unclear cases of how and even whether the two are distinguishable, does not necessarily undermine the utility of the distinction” (Feagin, 1995, p. 208).

As an example of the difficulty in distinguishing the two levels of response, Feagin describes how a “blush of embarrassment may be intensified by embarrassment over the blush,” such that no distinction of the two levels can be identified in the blushing of the person embarrassed. Metaemotions are complex, and elaborating on Feagin’s example will provide a good way to lay down some of the difficult, yet thought-provoking, aspects of metaemotions’ anatomy.

Feagin’s example of someone blushing in embarrassment over something, and to realizing it, subsequently feeling embarrassed about the first embarrassment, then blushes on top of the first blushing. The first striking aspect of the example is the fact that it may be impossible to distinguish the two blushes, from a phenomenological point of view. It raises the question of whether the two could be distinguished by other forms of registering emotional activity. For instance, if it were possible to make an image of the brain activity of the person embarrassed, would it also be the case that we would not be able to distinguish the first blush from the second?

Second, the example raises the question of how the proper delimitation of a metaemotion occurs. For example, it could be argued that the second embarrassment is not about the first embarrassment, but about the possibility of someone seeing the first embarrassment. In this latter case, it would not be an emotion about another emotion, but an emotion about the visibility of an emotion, and should be taken as a sequentially experienced emotion and not a second-order emotion. That is, to grasp metaemotions depends on a certain description of the situation and consequently a certain interpretation of the emotional experience.

Third, self-awareness is necessary for the occurrence of metaemotion in Feagin’s example, but it is not clear whether self-awareness is always needed for metaemotions. That is, looking critically at Feagin’s example raises the issue of whether awareness is necessary for the experience of metaemotions, and, if necessary, what type of awareness is required. Finally, one wonders if the subject who experiences the emotion can distinguish the first from second order when the emotions are the same. That is, it seems easier to see the distinction when one is embarrassed about being angry or happy about missing someone, but it is less clear whether one could distinguish the two levels when one is angry about being angry, sad about feeling sad, or happy about happiness.

If we return to Feagin’s article looking for clarification of the questions raised, we find even more questions regarding the nature of metaemotions. First, since the vocabulary we have for naming the two different levels is the same, are there emotion words that can only be placed at the first-order level and others that are only used at the second-order level? Second, Feagin’s article makes reference to two types of contexts, one in which one can experience second-order emotions (ordinary vs. aesthetic). She notes that the fact that the two levels of emotions in the two contexts cannot be distinguished by the

names used in those contexts demands that we investigate what differences concerning metaemotions can be found between these two contexts. Third, in Feagin's example, we can imagine that one can blush by thinking of the possibility of blushing. That is, that the second-order blushing can occur at a first-order level without the actual existence of the first blushing when, for instance, I blush at the possibility of having blushed without realizing. This would mean that the different layers are not fixed and can alter in such a way that the second-order can become a first-order emotion, which in turn is subject to other further metaemotions.

The literature on metaemotions contains two articles which attempt to better describe metaemotions despite these difficulties, and may provide some answers to the questions raised: Jones and Bodtker's (2001) article on "Mediating with Heart in Mind: Addressing Emotion in Mediation Practice" and Jäger and Bartsch's (2006) article on "Meta-emotions."

"Mediating with Heart in Mind: Addressing Emotion in Mediation Practice" discusses conflict, using the notion of metaemotion to clarify some of the dynamics that occur when conflict takes place. The article argues for the centrality of emotion in conflict and suggests that, given that "the link between meta-emotion and conflict is strongly suggested and empirically supported in family research (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997)" (Jones & Bodtker, 2001, p. 240), it may be the case that the basis for misunderstandings or disputes are differences in metaemotions. For Jones and Bodtker, the troubled nature of metaemotion is due to the fact that we are less aware of our metaemotional processes. They write, "[w]hat makes meta-emotions more problematic for mediation practice is that people typically are less consciously aware of their meta-emotions than they are of their emotions" (Jones & Bodtker, 2001, p. 240).

That is, metaemotions make interaction more opaque because we often assume that other people have the same metaemotions as we have, and this is not always the case. Jones and Bodtker further explain that

[m]eta-emotions color or influence the primary emotion being experienced—especially when the meta-emotion is different from the emotion (e.g., I feel angry, but have been taught not to be angry, so I feel ashamed at being angry. I now feel angry and shameful, which makes it difficult for me to be able to act in ways that are "strategic" or "appropriate" for both). (Jones & Bodtker, 2001, p. 239)

Consequently, metaemotions can be the basis of misunderstanding and conflict, and people's lack of awareness of their metaemotions makes it harder to solve conflicts. For example, the interaction between someone who feels embarrassed about being jealous and someone who feels proud about being jealous may give rise to misunderstanding and disputes, because one person will be hiding and repressing jealousy while the other one will be fostering and exhibiting jealousy, and the former will attempt to invalidate jealousy while the latter will encourage jealousy. Accordingly, Jones and Bodtker state that becoming aware of metaemotions can be an important way to shift perspective and adopt a more collaborative management of conflict (Jones & Bodtker, 2001, p. 240). Jones and Bodtker

explain that metaemotions have such an impact on first-order emotion because metaemotions, which are taught to us and culturally determined, mirror our values and beliefs about emotions.

The description of metaemotion does not answer the questions raised from Feagin's description, but it introduces other features of metaemotion that may ultimately be useful to better understand metaemotions.

First, the article states that there are always metaemotions when emotions are present. Unfortunately, Jones and Bodtker do not provide any reason or line of argumentation to explain why this should necessarily be the case. In addition, the assumption of constant metaemotions raises the question of whether there are any limits to the number of layers. That is, if it is the case that when there are emotions there are always metaemotions, then it may also mean that there are metaemotions about metaemotions (for they are also emotions) and ad infinitum. Jones and Bodtker do not deal at all with this problem. As we shall see in what follows, Jäger and Bartsch think differently, arguing that not every emotion elicits some metaemotion, consequently avoiding the problem of projecting infinite hierarchies of emotions.

Second, Jones and Bodtker also state that metaemotions have an effect on the first-order level of emotion, because they colour the first-order emotion. An interesting consequence of this suggestion is that it makes metaemotions especially relevant to moral emotions, because no matter how positive in terms of valence the first-order emotion, if the second order colours it negatively, the emotional process will most probably hold an overall negative valence. It is easy to see the immediate ethical implications of such suggestion. If it feels good to enjoy getting away with a lie, it may be painful to feel you are deceiving a friend and make it therefore more uncomfortable to get away with a lie.

Third, Jones and Bodtker make an important claim about the way metaemotional processes are educated, although, unfortunately, they do not elaborate on how this occurs, simply stating that it happens because metaemotions depend upon our values and beliefs. No doubt most of us would agree that education plays some sort of role in our emotional life. Yet we are perhaps not very clear on what exactly the education of emotion means: Is it a refinement of something already given? How does the refinement refine? Or are there cases in which emotions are different depending on the education people have had?

Finally, Jones and Bodtker write that we are less conscious of our second-order emotions than of our first-order emotions. Again, no explanation is given for this, but they must assume that our attention gets arrested at the first-order level of emotion since metaemotions are not easily distinguishable.

In "Meta-Emotions" (2006), Jäger and Bartsch explore the phenomenon in a different way than Jones and Bodtker, and attempt to clarify metaemotions by analysing their intentional structure and pointing out how they elucidate a number of issues of philosophy of mind and philosophy and psychology of emotions. Jäger and Bartsch begin their description of metaemotion in the following way:

Emotions, we wish to argue, can be intentionally directed at emotions. We shall call such higher-order emotions *meta-emotions*. Exploring this phenomenon will not only help us explain many allegedly ambivalent or paradoxical emotions, but also to analyse complex emotional states where the valence of some higher-order emotion matches that of a lower-level one. (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 181)

Jäger and Bartsch provide further description of the nature of metaemotions by a series of qualifications.

First, they restrict the label of metaemotions to intentional emotions, that is, by leaving aside all those kinds of secondary states such as moods, agitations, and bodily feelings that may be caused by first-order emotions. Second, they define metaemotion as only including cases of intrapersonal emotions. For though emotions can have as objects the emotions of other people, the second-order level of the phenomenon requires that the emotion be felt within the same personal structure (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 184). Third, they assume a general nonveridical character of metaemotions, writing that “[t]he emotional objects of a meta-emotion need not exist,” and furthermore “there is the phenomenon of emotional repression. Repressors tend to misinterpret their emotions or, in certain circumstances, even fail to notice them at all. Meta-emotions are thus not generally veridical” (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186). Fourth, they argue that not every emotion elicits some metaemotion (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186), therefore protecting the model from infinite hierarchies of emotions. However, they think that the quantity of possible various levels of metaemotion that may occur requires more than a philosophical reflection and cannot be established merely by philosophical research (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186).

The first two restrictions established by Jäger and Bartsch (2006) are important points to be made and can be reinforced in being further elaborated. For example, our emotional world is much richer than emotions as it includes moods, feelings, more vague sense of moods (e.g., feeling a sense of general agitation about a certain situation), and metaemotions themselves. From the description given by Jäger and Bartsch it is not clear that only emotions about emotions should be considered in the analysis of metaemotions. For instance, Mayer and Gashke show the interrelation of mood and metamood experience, concluding that “meta-mood experiences may be critical to interpersonal contact” (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988, p. 110). This means that the analysis of metaemotional level must somehow be applicable to someone who feels sad about a specific mood, or happy about a kind of agitation, or irritated at certain emotional vague uncomfortable emotional sense of itch. Consequently, this first point demands further explanation in order that our understanding of metalevel be able to deal with these cases.

Likewise, the second characteristic of metaemotions requires further elaboration to show the impact of its importance. Thus, the delimitation to intrapersonal emotions must somehow accommodate the fact that how others feel about our emotions can influence how we feel about our own emotions. In fact, whatever lessons we take from a better understanding of second-order emotional processes may help us to clarify how we share, disagree, and communicate emotions to others,

and perhaps provide some further clues to the functioning of empathy and sympathy.

However, the third restriction about metaemotions is open to objection and must be revised accordingly. Jäger and Bartsch argue that metaemotions are not generally veridical. As an illustration they write “A teenager’s pride and pathos of what she believes is her eternal love does not entail that her love is in fact eternal. It doesn’t even entail that it is love at all” (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186). Also, they note that it is necessary to acknowledge emotional repression, adding that “[m]oreover, there is the phenomenon of emotional repression. Repressors tend to misinterpret their emotions or, in certain circumstances, even fail to notice them at all” (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186). Jäger and Bartsch assume two possible ways in which emotions fail to be veridical: first, on the grounds that the object of a metaemotion does not need to exist; second, on the grounds that emotion is misinterpreted. The issue of how truth applies to emotion is a difficult one,³ but even if we accept Jäger and Bartsch’s take on it, their conclusions that metaemotions are generally not veridical is not sufficiently explained. First, similar possibilities exist for first-order emotions and yet Jäger and Bartsch do not seem to make similar assumptions about them. That is, we can imagine someone feeling fear of ghosts even when one accepts there are no such objects, and Jäger and Bartsch do not infer from this a general character of falsity of emotions. The same is true for emotional repressors. Both first- and second-order levels of emotional experience are subject to repressive behaviour, and Jäger and Bartsch do not infer from these facts that all emotions are not generally veridical.

Second, Jäger and Bartsch (2006) do not explain why the veracity of some metaemotion makes a difference, and what implications for the metaemotional level such difference (or lack of it) has. That is, the affirmation of lack of veracity of some metaemotions needs to be compared to the veracity of others to fully understand the importance of the veracity (or not) of metaemotions. And, furthermore, the conclusions drawn from this must then be related to how it connects to the notion of adequacy of emotional processes.

The two descriptions of metaemotions from the two articles show that the unequivocal existence of metaemotions does not offer equal unequivocal description about their nature. Moreover, the description of their nature seems to be plagued with questions such that we should consider whether emotion theory really needs this second-order level of emotion. All this is perhaps due to the real complexity of the subject matter (Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold, & Viehoff, 2008, p. 12); that is, why do we need to consider metaemotions separately and not, instead, just describe them like all other emotions, except that their object happens to be another emotion?⁴

Why Metaemotion is Crucial for Emotion Theory

The next part of the article will handle the objection raised by showing why metaemotion is an essential conceptual tool for

emotion theory despite the fact that researchers may have great difficulty clarifying their complete nature.

There are two reasons why metaemotions cannot be merely handled as another case of an emotion that simply takes other emotions as objects. First, because metaemotions necessarily have an impact on the value of the first-order emotion, or as Jones and Bodtger (2001) point out, the metaemotion colours the first-order emotion. This means that when we feel a metaemotion, its object (the first-order emotion) changes and with it also changes the emotional experience. That is, it is a completely different emotional scenario to say that someone was sad than to say that they were embarrassed that they were sad, or to say that someone was angry that they were sad. First-order emotions may colour their objects such that being angry with someone may make that person look ugly, but it does not change the object of my anger but my perception of it. However, when we are sad about our anger the first-order emotion becomes different than if we were to feel righteously happy about our anger, and therefore the second-order emotion changes the perception of the first-order emotion but also the contours of the first-order emotional experience. In sum, since metaemotions change the emotional impact of the first-order emotion, we obtain an incomplete picture of metaemotional processes if we only transfer information about first-order emotions to understand metaemotions. Second, the reflexive ability of our emotional world may be at the root of explaining the difference between the emotional lives of humans and of other species (Rosenberg, 1990).

By looking at the role that imagination plays in metaemotions, we can best appreciate the impact of metaemotions in emotions. When we have an experience we are not labelling emotions according to their layer; yet when we tell the story of that experience, including the metaemotional level may be absolutely necessary to obtain a precise description of the emotional importance of the experience. That is, when we are looking back at what happened, we are capable of placing the metaemotional level of a certain emotional occurrence, but when we experience a certain emotional situation we do not feel sadness as a metaemotion.⁵ That means that the description of experience, which includes the metaemotional level, may end up being surprising and revealing of both the subject who experiences and the event the person is experiencing. The information obtained with the description of metaemotions is not simply a matter of having more information about the experience; the extra knowledge we get from metaemotions may change the meaning of the experience altogether. Thus, when we experience imaginative situations we both experience (in the imagined version) and become aware of metaemotions, granting imaginative engagement a special place for the analysis of metaemotions and for better grasp of its value and impact on our experiences.

As an illustration take, for instance, a possible job interview (to use an example given by Peter Goldie, 2005, in "Imagination and the Distorting Power of Emotion"). When we imagine a job interview we try to anticipate what may happen in order to better control our emotional reactions and thus improve our chances of attaining the job. Goldie describes a person imagining a job

interview in which she knows that there will be a very unpleasant and aggressive member of the jury in the evaluation panel. He writes that the person who imagines this job interview knows that this person from the jury "is bound to ask endless questions which are designed to show off his own knowledge and not to test yours" (Goldie, 2005, pp. 130–131) and this will irritate the person who is imagining the interview immensely. The person who is going to the interview will try to imagine how the interview will unfold in order to protect herself from losing her temper because she really wants the job, and having it acknowledged beforehand may protect the person from her own emotional reactions. However, as Goldie further describes:

When it comes to the heat of the actual moment you become angry, and the man's manner, his voice, his line of questioning, his whole character, put your back up much more than you expected. And suddenly, to your later chagrin, what seems to you to be more important than anything else is to make sure that this man doesn't get in the last word. (Goldie, 2005, pp. 130–131)

According to Goldie (2005), the anger causes the person in the job interview to feel like the most important thing is to shut up the irritating member of the jury when she knew that this was precisely the most important thing to avoid doing when she imagined the job interview in the first place. The point of Goldie's example is to indicate how sometimes it is hard to imagine what emotions can make us do. Consequently, imaginative exercises in which one takes one's own perspective may give us the illusion that we are in control of our emotions. Accordingly, Goldie is going to argue for another type of imaginative ability, namely that of imagining from an external perspective that is psychologically more natural than imagining from the inside, and also more advantageous because it prevents one from being blinded by one's own emotions. Goldie further explains that this example imagining from an external perspective will provide the necessary distance for the jobseeker to see how ridiculously and how fast she will lose her temper when the specific member from the panel asks her difficult questions.

I wish to further elaborate on the example by showing how the anger described changes its tonality with the further description of metaemotions. In the first modification of the example, the grip of anger makes you do what seems to you at the time the most important thing but what you knew was not the right thing to do. Subsequently, you are overwhelmed by a sense of peace, which makes you feel relieved and ultimately happy that you got angry. You have thought that getting the job is important, but being honest is far more important as there will be other opportunities for employment, but being dishonest can become a habit that you do not want to acquire, thus the sense of peace ultimately felt about the anger.

In the second modification, the grip of anger makes you do what seems to you at the time the most important thing but what you knew was not the right thing to do. As a result, you feel overwhelmed by a sense of panic, which makes you feel devastated and ultimately completely angry with yourself for getting angry. Though there are other job opportunities, the urgent need for income to cover your son's medical bills makes you think you were selfish in letting yourself be taken over by the anger

and you get angry with yourself for being angry, thus not having measured your priorities well beforehand.

In the third modification, the grip of anger makes you do what seems to you at the time the most important thing but what you knew was not the right thing to do. And you feel overwhelmed by a sense of panic, which makes you feel devastated and ultimately completely angry with yourself for getting angry. Though there are other job opportunities, the urgent need for income to cover your son's medical bills makes you think you were selfish in letting yourself be taken over by the anger and you get angry with yourself for being angry. Then, you can imagine yourself getting angrier and angrier to such an extent that you will make the rest of the day miserable and full of mistakes. It reminds you that being angry at yourself for being always angry is a common emotional pattern. You remember the silly actions and statements you end up making by being angry at being angry, and you feel how ridiculous it is to feel angry at being angry. The humorous twist releases you from the pattern of anger, making you laugh at yourself with your own imagined outcome of the interview. At this point the anger about anger has now acquired a different feel and value than it had in the previous modification, thus illustrating how an emotion about an emotion modifies the impact of the first-order emotion. In the second modification of the example the overall valence of being angry, and of being angry at being angry, is negative; however, in our last modification the valence of anger seems to have been modified into a lighter tone, and perhaps even to have changed from negative to a neutral valence.

Of course, imaginative engagement is also clearly conditioned by the expectations of the person who imagines the situation (is she desperate for the job?), as well as the person's experience (how many job interviews has she gone through?) and the imaginative ability of the person. Consequently, this means that the examples could be even more complex if we were to increase the length of the story or its details. Nevertheless, the three modifications of Goldie's example clearly show that the valence of a certain emotional process can be changed with metaemotions.

Emotional valence is a complex issue and, as Colombetti (2005) has shown, it raises many problems such as the conflation of the valence of emotion with the valence of its aspects (Colombetti, 2005). I agree with Colombetti's sharp critical description of the problems of valence, and I want to add that the negative and positive valence of an emotion incorporates the layers of emotions attached to it and, therefore, an important part of clearly understanding valence requires identifying the effect of metaemotions. In fact, one of the things we try to do in education is to give people certain packages of emotional processes such that they grow up seeking satisfaction in whole processes rather than in brief moments or over the short term. Simplistically we can say that educators aim at teaching that the whole emotional value of an experience is only over when experience reaches a closure. For example, a music teacher aims to show that the frustration of a specific failure to play a piece on the piano is a part of the final joy of successfully mastering the piano, and therefore the valence of frustration

changes as the student changes feeling sad about his continuous frustration to becoming proud of continuous resistance to frustration. This is perhaps why we find reflection on metaemotion in education and parenting literature. In *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting* Gottman (1997) proposed that parents' metaemotion philosophy is intrinsically connected with how they socialize emotions in their children (Hakim-Larson, Parker, Lee, Goodwin, & Voelker, 2006, p. 230). Consequently, parents try to educate emotions by way of metaemotion; for example, parents may try to slowly connect the pleasure of a momentary emotion to a wide variety of metaemotions to refine the impact of first-order emotions. Metaemotion may provide a way to better understand what is going on by opening up the possibility that what we do in emotional education is to model the relations between first-order and second-order emotional processes similar to how sculptors handle clay. That is, the connection between first order and second order is not given like basic emotions are given. So educators direct or guide the colouring done by second-order emotions. For example, families in which people are more attentive and aware of the possible harm caused by jealousy may encourage embarrassment about being jealous by punishing or verbally condemning those who experience jealousy; while in families where jealousy stands as a symbol of the intensity of their affection, instances of jealousy may be received with tenderness and promote rewarding actions. In addition, these educational practices may format the way in which adults regulate and control their emotional lives, thus reinforcing the evidence that the way male children get feedback from peers and parents may also be at the root of men's fear and avoidance of their emotions (Jakupcak, 2003, p. 534).

Emotional learning is a complex endeavour and it is perhaps structurally akin to aesthetic development, as De Sousa suggests when he writes that "[w]e learn to feel new emotions such as we learn to experience new art" (De Sousa, 1990, p. 436). De Sousa's comments are speculative and, as he states himself, require research and support from empirical research (De Sousa, 1990, p. 434). However, the introduction of metaemotions provides another tool for speculation, because it provides potential criteria for one of the ways in which people conduct emotional learning. That is, the colour metaemotions grant to emotions suggests that emotional education—of becoming acquainted and mastering the system of emotional logic (Rosenberg, 1990, pp. 6–7), as well as controlling emotional displays (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 8) and being able to recognize and accept emotional experiences (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 10)—is permeated by understanding how metaemotions promote, hinder, and widen emotional life.

In sum, it should be clear by now that emotion theory needs to retain the dimension of order of emotion, because even though metaemotions raise many questions about their nature, boundaries, and role, the recognition of how their existence radically changes our emotional world demands continued research about them. Consequently, the article will end by providing some of the further questions and possible future research ideas on metaemotions. Recognizing the crucial presence of metaemotions in our emotional landscape requires us to see in

which way further research about them needs to be made, given that their nature is so hard to grasp.

Concluding Remarks and Further Research

The conclusion follows this lead in two different lines. The first will present some of the puzzles about metaemotions themselves, the second some possible applications of this type of philosophical reflection to other theoretical fields.

The nature of metaemotion needs to be further established to better examine how many layers of metaemotional processes there can be (Jäger & Bartsch, 2006, p. 186), to establish criteria for identifying which emotions can be metaemotions and which cannot, to identify which occasions promote the metaemotional level and which ones are immune to such further emotional complexity. In addition, the fact that metaemotion may play out differently in aesthetic and ordinary contexts can provide another mode to investigate metaemotions. And, of course, the way metaemotions interfere with other phenomena, such as conflict, relationships, education, argumentation, moral action, and economic expectations, may provide further clues to fully understand them. Furthermore, nothing in the concept itself makes metaemotion necessarily good. In this article metaemotions were construed as positive and helpful (helping us to get prepared for job interviews, educating emotions) but it is crucial to see that metaemotions can modify the whole emotional process and distort it.

Education offers an ample field of applying the notion of metaemotions with numerous possibilities. For example, developmentalists could measure the pairs of emotion/metaemotion that occur in parents and child, establishing the impact of parents' metaemotion philosophy, or perhaps research could verify which emotion/metaemotion pairs children retain from a specific story.

These are a few possibilities for further work to be done, which would be a good step for taking emotional complexity seriously,⁶ so that we can better see that "if we cease to think of our emotions as inevitable in just that way, we are also more likely to view them as open to modification, and to enlist them as instruments of freedom rather than tools of self-oppression" (De Sousa, 1990, p. 446).

Notes

- 1 In the literature, emotions about emotion are referred to as both a "second-order emotion" or "metaemotion." I will use metaemotion to refer to this second-order level of emotional reality because the term "second order" is sometimes misleading as it is also used to indicate emotions that appear sequentially, such as in Salmela's paper on "What is Emotional Authenticity?" (2005, p. 213).
- 2 Thanks to Peter Goldie for suggesting that our general reflexive nature would be a good way to explain emotional reflexivity.
- 3 See Mikko Salmela's "True Emotions" (2006), and De Sousa's "Emotional Truth" (2002) and "Emotions: What I Know, What I'd Like

to Think I Know, and What I'd Like to Think" (2004) for examination of the issue of veracity of emotions.

- 4 Thanks to Frank Lihoreau for providing the objection.
- 5 Thanks to Gabrielle De Angelis for pointing this out to me.
- 6 Following Colombetti's advice when she writes "I think that, if we want Science to eventually hold its ground in the experimental 'tribunal of experience' (Charland, 2005, p. 93) we should take complexity seriously rather than ironically, and acknowledge it *by default*." (Colombetti, 2005, p. 123).

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