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What is an Emotion? (second edition)

Classic and Contemporary Readings
edited by Robert C. Solomon
Oxford University Press, 2003

The first edition of this collection, co-edited by Cheshire Calhoun, has been a staple text for philosophy courses on the emotions since its publication nearly twenty years ago. Since then, interest in the emotions amongst Anglo-American philosophers has steadily increased, fuelled partly by recent work in the sciences. The appearance of this edition is to be welcomed, and represents a major contribution to teaching resources within this field.

The first thing that the reader familiar with the first edition will notice is the sheer number of additions. Solomon has managed to retain all but one of the original articles (although others have been trimmed in size) while still keeping the book to a size that will not deter students. The volume is deceptively slim, actually weighing in at 300-plus pages. The other main change is the loss of the original, helpful introduction, presumably to make room for some of the new additions.

The collection consists of four parts, each of which has been substantially expanded, preceded by a short introduction. Together, the selections serve to provide a good survey of the history of the study of the emotions, starting with Aristotle and taking us right up to the present (or 1997, to be precise). It is worth noting that, unlike the first edition, the emphasis here is very much on recent work. How welcome this is will obviously depend upon one's particular interests.

Solomon's brief introductions to each selection are particularly helpful in drawing out the connections between current psychological theories and their philosophical precursors. They draw the reader's attention to similarities and disparities between theories—we can, for example, trace the history of cognitive theories, see which hold that emotions are essential for good reasoning and which regard them as hindering it, and so on.

The first part covers the historical background, and includes passages from Aristotle, the Stoics, Descartes, Spinoza and Hume. Of these, the section on the Stoics is the only new inclusion, and comprises passages from the early Stoics, Seneca and a critical passage from Galen. The short passage from Seneca's *De Ira* is a particularly welcome addition, setting the tone for much later discussion of the emotions. Seneca argues that emotions are judgements in response to natural 'first impulses', and thus stand in opposition to good reasoning, which is deliberative and not reactive in this manner.

This approach contrasts with that of Aristotle, who holds that emotions can be both virtuous and appropriate for the situation. Feeling angry at a genuine insult is not a 'first impulse'—it is (or, at least, may be) an apt response to another's poor behaviour.

His account also seeks to avoid characterising emotions as either purely physical or purely mental; mental states and physiological changes both have a role to play in his picture. This excerpt, as with all of the readings in this section, should help persuade the non-philosopher that the intelligent study of the emotions did not start with William James.

All of the readings in this section are valuable, and those from Aristotle and Hume are, of course, essential. The section is, however, clearly far from exhaustive. It would have been nice to see some excerpts from the likes of Plato and Hobbes, to name but two. The absence of such writers from the first, slimmer edition was entirely understandable given that each section comprised between four and six entries. In light of the expansion of several later sections, Part One now seems rather thin, and is all the more obviously incomplete. I do not intend to sound overly negative—this is still a useful introduction to certain historical theories, if not as thorough survey of the historical literature as it might have been.

Part Two is the section most expanded, and concerns ‘the meeting of philosophy and psychology’. Here we find classic texts from Darwin, Walter Cannon, John Dewey, and Freud, as well as an excerpt from James’ *What is an Emotion?*, a key foundation of the modern study of the emotions. Modern work is represented by Schachter and Singer, Paul Ekman, Richard Lazarus, Nico Frijda, Catherine Lutz, and Antonio Damasio. All but the first of these modern pieces are new additions.

Connections between the psychological and philosophical literature are clear, and serve to demonstrate the value of both disciplines in the study of the emotions. James’ theory, in which emotions are perceptions of physiological changes, echoes certain aspects of Descartes’ theory. The cognitive theorist’s view that emotions are judgements can be found in the readings from Schachter and Singer, who attempt to append this claim to an essentially Jamesian model, and Damasio, who argues that emotions are required for good judgement. The relevance to the Stoic view could not be clearer. Lazarus’s account, in which emotions are appraisals of the world, is an exemplar of a cognitive account.

The remaining two sections concern the study of the emotions within philosophy: firstly within the Continental Tradition, and then within the broadly analytical tradition.

Section Three comprises passages from Brentano, Scheler and Sartre, as well as a specially-commissioned article on Heidegger’s theory of the emotions by Charles Guignon (required due to the obstinacy of Heidegger’s literary executors, Solomon informs us). Brentano’s contribution consists primarily in a discussion of intentionality (as might be expected), which should help the reader understand much of the philosophical literature. The Phenomenological tradition is well represented by Scheler and Heidegger. The section taken from Sartre’s *The Emotions: A Sketch of A Theory* is essential, comprising as it does an attack on the James-Lange theory stemming from the writer’s famous account of human freedom. Emotions, argues Sartre, are voluntary strategies to avoid committing oneself to action. Emotive behaviour, according to Sartre, ‘is not *effective*’. It is a lesser form of action, a psychological reaction that occurs when ‘we can no longer live in so urgent and

difficult a world'. This account, then, can also be seen to stand in opposition to the Aristotelian account of emotion as virtuous and appropriate.

Part Four, entitled 'Conceptual Analysis and Emotion', focuses on philosophical work broadly placed in the dominant Anglo-American tradition, and has been expanded significantly from the first edition. Originally containing six entries, five new papers have been added and one, by Irving Thalberg, lost.

The papers here represent the broad range of approaches to the phenomena found in modern Anglophone philosophy. We have Ryle's classic behaviourist approach, developed further in Errol Bedford's paper; the cognitive approach, argued for by Solomon in his contribution and challenged by Calhoun and by Michael Stocker. Paul Griffiths goes further, presenting a challenge to the whole project by taking an eliminativist stance towards the idea of the emotions in general. The influence of Darwinian evolutionary theory can be found throughout the section. Ronald De Sousa and Patricia Greenspan focus upon the connection between rationality and emotion. Anthony Kenny, in a passage from *Action, Emotion and Will*, focuses upon intensionality in a discussion that may prove somewhat difficult for the non-philosopher. Finally, Martha Nussbaum takes us back to the start with a thorough and intelligent critique of the Stoic view, drawing upon much recent psychological work in the process.

Whereas the first edition seemed a balanced, impartial collection, this edition may seem rather more geared towards the analytical philosopher with an interest in the sciences, or the scientist interested in analytical philosophy. To criticize the book for this would be churlish, though. Solomon, a writer familiar with both Continental and Anglophone philosophy, appears to have expanded the volume in an attempt to make it more representative of recent work on the emotions, which has tended to come from within the psychological and analytical fields. It is an unavoidable result of this that the historical literature and work within the Continental tradition may appear somewhat sidelined. Still, a few further additions to Part One may have restored a sense of balance to the volume.

The second edition of *What Is an Emotion?* is still an essential resource for any student of the emotions. Given the quantity and quality of recent work, those lecturers and students familiar with the first edition should think about bringing things up to date with this volume. For other readers, few other books would serve to give such an accurate and rewarding picture of the place of philosophy and psychology in shedding light on such a fundamental part of human nature.