

Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy

EDITED BY

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
United Kingdom

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First published 2012

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-957991-4

printed in Great Britain by
MPG Books Group, Bodmin and King's Lynn

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Introduction

Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro

In recent years, there has been a renewed attention to the emotions amongst philosophers, and it is notable that this interest cuts across the discipline—from ethics to philosophy of mind to the history of philosophy. That emotions ~~should~~ be at the center of philosophical inquiry should not ~~come as~~ a surprise: the emotions are an integral part of our nature as human beings, connecting us with other animals, figuring in our responses to our environment, and shaping our interactions and bonds with other human beings. Emotions, however, are somewhat hard to get a handle on. How ought we to think of them? Are they mere physiological responses to stimuli? Or are they properly speaking mental states? If so, how do they figure in the economy of the human mind?

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There has been a long tradition of taking emotions as both opposed to reason and rational thought and principally as motivating of action. Until quite recently, much philosophical work on emotions has honed in on this motivational role that emotions play. If emotions are devalued with respect to reason, they are invoked to explain why we do the worse even though we see the best course of action: the impetus to act derived from our emotions trumped our best judgments. And if they are more highly valued than reason, our emotions give us our ends, and the work of reason is simply to chart the course to achieving those ends.

This focus on the motivational role of emotions discounts the many ways in which emotions figure in our cognitive lives. Curiosity and wonder seem necessary for acquiring knowledge, and knowledge itself is taken to involve a kind of joy. Equally, emotions need not exclusively obscure our view of the way things are or interfere with our ability to judge properly how things are. Emotions, or some kind of similar bias, are unavoidable in our weighting of evidence, and of what we take to be salient. They shape how we see the world.

The recognition of the multiplicity of roles emotions play in relation to thought raises many questions about just what ~~the~~ relations are. One approach, a so-called cognitivist account of emotions, simply identifies emotions with certain kinds of judgments. While such an approach does call attention to the ways in which emotions

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figure in cognitive life, it can be seen as oversimplifying the complexity of the involvement of emotions in cognition ~~(and hence of accounts)~~.

This volume aims to do three things. First, historians of philosophy have typically focused on the discussions of the moral relevance of emotions. With the exception of ancient philosophy, and most notably the Stoic theory of the emotions, there has not yet been much attention within the history of philosophy to the place of emotions in cognition. The present collection of articles shifts the focus of discussion to this treatment of emotion in the medieval and early modern periods. Second, while much work has been done in clarifying the debts the later thinkers owe to their predecessors with regard to issues in metaphysics and epistemology as well as the transformations they effect, there has been very little work which aims to trace lines of thought about emotion. Though each of the contributions to this volume stands on its own, as a whole they serve to begin a discussion about the continuities between medieval and early modern thinking about the emotions. In this regard, there is also a discussion of the Renaissance treatment of the emotions of cognitive life. Here, we get only a snapshot of a period of philosophical work often passed over, but even this snapshot serves to interrupt the tendency to draw a line straight from the medieval to the early modern period and so invites questions about how to weave an intellectual history of accounts of our emotions in our cognitive lives. Finally, we hope that attention to the debates and concerns that engage philosophers of the medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods can provide the contemporary debate with a host of ideas regarding the relationship between emotions, cognition, and reason, or the way emotions figure in our cognitive lives.

As we have been suggesting, there is not just one medieval or early modern theory of the emotions, and nor is there is just one angle under which authors such as Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Hume discuss the ways in which the emotions figure in our cognitive lives. The thirteen contributions explore this from the point of view of four key themes: the situation of emotions within the human mind; the intentionality of emotions and their role in cognition; emotions and action; and the role of emotion in self-understanding and the social situation of individuals. While each essay is categorized only under that theme which is dominant in its discussion, many essays do bridge more than one of these themes.

1 The place of emotions within the human mind, or the distinction between emotions in the sensitive soul and those of the intellective soul. Medieval authors debated whether emotions are proper to that part of the soul we humans share with animals—the so-called sensitive soul—or are located in higher-level psychological powers that make up the so-called intellective soul. For instance, authors such as Thomas Aquinas allowed for emotion-like phenomena in the intellective part of the soul but considered only sensitive emotions as emotions in the strict sense; other authors, such as John Duns Scotus, rejected the idea that sensitive emotions could be considered as properly human emotions and they put their emphasis on emotions in

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the will. At stake in this debate is a simple issue: the relation between humans and animals. Are human emotions something distinctive of a rational animal or are they something we share with animals, creatures not fully capable of judgment? Is there a way of characterizing emotions as something more than a result of stimuli, and so dependent on human capacities for cognition, without yet characterizing them as judgments?

→ Peter King's contribution, "Dispassionate Passions," examines the history of the distinction between emotions in the sensitive soul and those in the intellectual soul, tracing ~~its origin in~~ Stoic thought, and more particularly in the Stoic concept of *eupatheiai*. Though authors from Augustine onwards rejected the details of the Stoic account of emotions as judgments, they nevertheless held on to the idea of a class of emotions that does not come with the usual corporeal disturbances characteristic of lower-level animal-like emotions. Both Descartes and Spinoza talk of intellectual emotions and one might think that their discussions find their source in this debate.

Ian Drummond's contribution, "John Duns Scotus and the Passions of the Will," takes up where King's discussion ends. He investigates why Duns Scotus considers the higher-level emotions as genuinely human passions. For Duns Scotus, however, it is the will and not the intellect that is distinctively human. Taking the seat of these higher-level emotions to be the will and not intellect leads to a serious complication. The experience of emotions such as love, anger, fear, and the like has a distinctive passivity; we can feel overcome by these emotions. Yet the will, for Scotus, is a radically free power, and it is this very freedom that makes it the mark of humanity. How is the passivity of emotions compatible with ~~their being radically free~~? Duns Scotus saw this problem himself and proposed a series of solutions to how the will can have emotions which are passions of the soul. However, according to Drummond, these solutions are not entirely successful.

Duns Scotus's account of emotions had an enormous influence on late Scholasticism. Simo Knuuttila's contribution, "Sixteenth Century Discussions of the Passions of the Will," is the first attempt ever to examine the reception of this aspect of Scotist thought in sixteenth-century philosophy, and in particular in John Mair and Francisco Suárez. As Knuuttila demonstrates, Suárez tries to improve Scotus's teaching on the passions in the will by combining it with his own theory of non-causal connections between psychological acts. The chapter also focuses on reactions to Scotus's account of the conditions of pleasure and distress, namely the debate about whether mere inclinations without effective or conditional volitions are sufficient to give rise to pleasure or distress.

2 *Emotion, intentionality, and cognition.* Emotions stand in close relationships to a variety of cognitive acts. I feel fear in perceiving a spider on my desk, a pianist who has belief in her talent feels hope about her upcoming performance, a soldier who judges himself to be in a life-threatening situation in combat feels despair, and so on. What is the relation between our emotions and cognitions such as perceptions, beliefs, and

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judgments? Do our cognitions trigger or cause emotions? Or is there another way of characterizing the relation between them? What kind of cognitions can stand in relations to emotions at all? Are emotions themselves kinds of cognitions and so subject to reasons?

Once again, this set of questions is tied up with our understanding of the relation between human beings and animals. We are inclined to allow that animals too experience emotions, for instance, fear which causes them to flee from predators. Is an animal's fear tied up with cognitions in a way akin to the fear human beings experience? In "Why is the Sheep Afraid of the Wolf? Medieval Debates on Animal Passions," Dominik Perler studies various interpretations of Avicenna's famous account of animal behavior and shows how they influenced discussions of emotions in both animals and human beings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Central to the story is the role of "intentions," qualities such as harmfulness, which are not sensible qualities but which the animal is still said to perceive. Perler shows that different accounts of how we grasp these qualities also bear on the question of the manner in which our emotional responses in situations are cognitively penetrable, or subject to reasons.

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It is tempting to think of emotions as caused by a particular perception or belief or judgment, that is to think of my perception of a spider triggering a fear response, or one's belief in one's talent causing hope and self-confidence, or a soldier's judgment of unavoidable danger as causing despair. But this conception of emotions as caused by cognitive states is tied to a particular conception of the mind. Claude Panaccio, in his "Intellections and Volitions in Ockham's Nominalism," examines the implications of the nominalist ontology of William of Ockham for how we think about the interaction between cognitions and emotions. In Ockham's account of the mind, it makes no sense to talk about will and intellect as two distinct psychological powers. There is only one power, the human intellectual soul, capable of different types of mental acts, that is, volitions and cognitions. On this view, emotions and other volitional acts should not be conceived of as acts of one faculty caused by acts of another faculty. Rather, what is required is an account of how different types of acts of one and the same power are related to each other. Panaccio also discusses the extent to which emotions are considered as volitional acts by later medieval philosophers.

From reconsidering the causal relation between cognitions and emotions it is a short step to revisiting the question of the intentionality of the emotions. Intentional objects, thought of as the objects to which our thoughts are directed, are essential to our experience of emotions. Hate or love is always hate or love directed at certain objects. Again, it is tempting to think that emotions derive their intentionality merely from an antecedent cognition. But if emotions are not to be thought of simply as caused by an antecedent cognition, another explanation of their intentionality is required. According to Martin Pickavé, in "Emotion and Cognition in Later Medieval Philosophy: the Case of Adam Wodeham," the fact that some fourteenth-

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century authors, such as Adam Wodeham, insist that emotions are themselves cognitions, should be understood as part of a debate over intentionality. For Wodeham, the intrinsic intentionality of the emotions can only be preserved if we take them to be cognitions themselves, although most of his contemporaries did not find it necessary—or even possible—to go this far.

Early modern philosophers would have been much more at ease with Adam Wodeham's idea than his immediate contemporaries. Lisa Shapiro, in her "How We Experience the World: Passionate Perception in Descartes and Spinoza," traces an attempt to grapple with a position that takes emotions and sensations as not different in kind, that is, as both intentional and motivational states. Shapiro maintains that this is Descartes's view, and that he is confronted with the question of how emotions differ from ordinary sensations of objects, as they obviously do, and she argues that Descartes accounts for this difference by distinguishing between the ways in which both types of mental acts present their objects to the mind. Spinoza takes Descartes's resolution as unsatisfactory, and goes one step further by eliminating any robust distinction between emotions and sensations; for him both are simply two aspects of the same experience, and imagination of an object.

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Deborah Brown's "Agency and Attention in Malebranche's Theory of Cognition" examines how Malebranche deploys what is now referred to as the framing effect of emotions in an effort to understand how we can gain mastery over ourselves and our emotions without presupposing an overarching will. Though it is common to think of emotions as inhibiting a clear assessment of our environment, Brown shows that Malebranche recognizes that they also direct our attention towards objects and their features. She argues, further, that for Malebranche, the emotion of wonder moves us to redirect our attention and so to re-examine our beliefs and correct for the ways in which the other passions color our perceptions. Thus, through wonder we are able to control ourselves without appeal to the will.

3 *Emotions and action.* If emotions can have an effect on what we perceive and hold to be true, they certainly have an effect on human behavior. But how we are to think of the way emotions move us is less clear. When medieval and early modern authors talk about the emotions' impact they often use expressions such as "inciting" and "inclining" and their cognates. What could it mean that emotions incite or incline, and in particular, what could it mean that they incite or incline the will? Drawing on a suggestion found in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work, in his "Reasons, Causes, Inclinations," Paul Hoffman asks whether this talk of inclining the will refers to a third way of influencing the will, one which is neither providing the will with reason for acting nor causing an act of the will. Although Hoffman in the end does not think that one can make sense of this third way by drawing on Aquinas, Leibniz, and Descartes, he provides a rich survey of different views of how inclining the will may take place.

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→ No matter how we understand the emotions as affecting action, the fact remains that they do move us to act. According to the traditional view, human flourishing involves

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rational control over these emotional responses. On this traditional view, the measure of proper emotional response is determined by the end intrinsic to human nature. Many early modern philosophers, however, reject the idea of natural ends. Without a natural end to guide us, how ought we to regulate our emotions? From what source spring the norms of what counts as rational use of emotions? Dennis Des Chene, in his "Using the Passions," examines Descartes's view of the source of normativity with regard to the regulation of the emotions. Des Chene takes seriously Descartes's idea that moral philosophy is an outgrowth of natural philosophy, an idea captured in the metaphor of the "tree of philosophy" introduced in the prefatory letter to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy* (AT 9:14) and followed through in the attention to physiological detail in Descartes's account of the emotions. He asks: Where in the tree of philosophy do we find normative content induced? Des Chene's answer suggests that normativity is already present in Descartes's physiology and that normative content is carried through to his account of the regulation of the passions.

4 *The role of emotions in self-understanding and the social situation of individuals.* Insofar as our emotions are experienced in a way that seems to be profoundly our own, it is easy to think that emotions are essentially private experiences, albeit those through which we come to understand ourselves. A focus on the regulation of our emotions seems only to reaffirm this thought, for it would appear that the regulation of the passions is of importance only to the individual who feels them and who in regulating them aims to promote her own well-being. Emotions, however, also reach outwards. Not only do emotions have things in the world as intentional objects, they are also expressed towards and communicated to others. And both these intentional and social dimensions have an effect on our self-understanding and our efforts to regulate the passions.

→ Love provides a paradigm of the way in which emotions reach outwards. Not only is love perfective of the lover in virtue of being directed towards another, in thinkers like Thomas Aquinas love is considered the most fundamental emotion, and other emotions are sometimes explained in terms of love (or its opposite). Sabrina Ebbersmeyer's "The Philosopher as Lover: Renaissance Debates on Platonic *Eros*" highlights the central role the Platonic theory of love played for philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino, Leon Ebreo, and Giordano Bruno in the Italian Renaissance. This love, a desire for the beautiful, moves the mind to self-knowledge and wisdom, and to a state in which it transcends itself. According to these Renaissance authors, only the philosopher turns out to be the true lover.

Whereas Ebbersmeyer focuses on the role of love in achieving wisdom, Lilli Alanen, in her "Spinoza on Passions and Self-Knowledge: the Case of Pride," shows how even a self-directed love—pride and self-esteem—demands that we move beyond ourselves to achieve self-knowledge. According to Spinoza, we perceive ourselves as individuals through emotions and most notably through pride and self-esteem. However, these emotions, just by being passive states, entail that our knowledge of ourselves is inadequate. Only by transcending our own particular perspective can we hope to

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achieve a real self-understanding, and so achieve the freedom proper to an agent. However, this transcendence would seem to undermine the very idea of the self that is the supposed object of knowledge.

In Amy Schmitter's contribution on David Hume, "Family Trees: Sympathy, Comparison and the Communication of the Passions in Hume and his Predecessors," the social dimension of emotions comes fully to the forefront. Two main features come to mind when we think of the social dimension of emotions. On the one hand, some emotions are essentially social, for instance envy, anger, pride, but also respect and humility. On the other hand, emotions are shared and transmitted between persons; one person's emotional states lead to responsive emotional attitudes in another person. Hume is known for recognizing the importance of socially generated emotions and he has elaborate accounts of sympathy and the other mechanisms involved in the transmission of emotions. Schmitter shows that on both of these issues Hume resembles some of his predecessors, notably Malebranche and Hobbes. Yet, what she considers most distinctive in Hume is the idea that social cohesion can be founded on a genuine "division of affective labor."

It is worth making explicit a point about terminology. As the contributions in this volume illustrate, medieval and early modern authors use a wide variety of terms when they refer to phenomena such as love, hate, fear, anger, hope, pleasure and the like, phenomena we commonly refer to as emotions. It is well known that the term "emotion" and its cognates did not enter European languages before the sixteenth century, and so one might worry that the title of this volume is anachronistic, bringing what are in fact diverse phenomena under one concept, and moreover one that postdates them. By deploying the term "emotions" in both the title of volume and in this introduction we do not mean to be making an ontological claim about what thinkers of this period refer to. Rather, we aim to be drawing attention to a family resemblance between a range of terms and their referents. The phenomena we currently refer to as emotions have a long history of being hard to capture in language. Augustine expresses surprise at the numerous expressions in use in his time. In a famous passage of the *City of God* he mentions five Latin terms: movements of the mind [*animi motus*], perturbations [*perturbationes*], affections [*affectiones*], affects [*affectus*], and passions [*passiones*] (IX.4). And, of course, later periods and the vernacular languages expand this list.

There are two points to be made. First, one should be careful not to put too much emphasis on the terms involved. It is no doubt a sign of a dismissive attitude to refer to emotions as perturbations or even sicknesses of the soul [*morbi animae*], typical Stoic expressions for emotions. But it is less clear whether the other terms used, for instance passion or affect, imply specific views about the emotions. Both terms allude to the idea that an emotion is experienced passively. But there is no standard use of both expressions. Aquinas, for instance, will reserve "passion (of the soul)" for what he considers emotions proper, that is, the movements of the sensitive appetite, whereas "affect" stands for emotion-like states in the will. In clear opposition to Aquinas, Duns Scotus will reserve "passion (of the soul)" for what he considers the proper human emotions in

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the will. Descartes distinguishes between the passions in general, which include sensations of external objects as well as internal sensations like hunger and thirst, and passions in the special sense. And Spinoza has good reasons of his own to prefer the term "affect." Obviously, emotion terms are not always synonymous. To find out a given author's views regarding emotions, more is required than just a superficial look at the expressions involved.

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Second, one need not claim that all the terms in play in this broad swathe of history are equivalent, and so that the accounts are pinpointing the exact same thing, to propose that there is a relationship between them. This volume does presuppose that there is such a relation, and that there is a relation between the discussions of the past and our own contemporary discussion, but it does not presuppose what that relation is. That is, though we do presuppose that there is some continuity between the discussions of contemporary psychologists and thirteenth-century philosophers, we want to claim neither that they hold the same views about phenomena such as love and anger nor that they are talking about precisely the same things. Our presupposition maintains the common-sensical position that there is enough of an overlap in the objects under discussion that we can see points of agreement and disagreement, and that we can see a set of issues that bears a sufficient resemblance to those of concern to us now to allow us to look back to our intellectual history for insight. Indeed, we hope that the readings of these essays will help to enrich our understanding of the connections between medieval and early modern thought on these phenomena we group under the concept "emotion," as well as of the relation of those thinkers to our contemporary discussions.

The papers in this volume emerged from a workshop on "Emotion and Cognition in Early Modern Philosophy" held at Simon Fraser University in May 2008, with a generous grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. All the participants benefited from the very rich and interesting discussions. The editors would like to thank Roger Checkley and especially Lauren Kopajtic for their editorial assistance, as well as all the contributors for their patience through the editorial process.

There are ~~and~~ shockingly few ways of expressing thanks, but we do insist that our feelings of gratitude to Peter Momtchiloff for his support of this volume and his sage advice and patience along the way is a distinct pleasure.