

CURRENT THEOLOGY

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PASSIONS AND PRINCIPLES

Passions—irrational, self-indulgent eruptions into the tranquil course of a well-ordered moral life—interfere with moral judgments, at least according to some moral commonplaces. Moral education aims to strengthen the critical faculties against the deceptive impulses of emotion by raising universal moral concerns that transcend the immediate interests of panting passion. Since religious morality fears emotional excess, many a preacher echoes Charles Chauncy, the foremost critic of the Great Awakening of 1740: “There is such a thing as real religion . . . and ’tis in its nature, a sober, calm, reasonable thing.”¹

In recent years, ethics has become less suspicious of emotion’s role in moral experience. As moral philosophy rediscovers the classical interest in character, disposition, and moral development, it pays more attention to the affective side of the agent. And as social ethics incorporates data from anthropology and sociology, a universal, invariant rational core to ethics seems less and less plausible. Even though the defenders of Kantian universalism still denigrate emotional experience as premoral, other moral philosophers are recognizing that well-ordered affectivity guides moral decision-making through discerning perception and virtuous dispositions. Moral theologians who inherited a rationalist natural-law tradition have not paid as much critical attention to this dimension as did their supposed patron saint, Thomas Aquinas. His ethics centers on the virtues because the practical moral norm is *recta ratio*, reason directed by sound inclination. The passions participate in reason, even if it only rules them “politically” rather than “despotically.”²

Recent discussion on passions and principles among philosophers and psychologists illumines the interplay of reason and affectivity in moral experience. We will explore a model of mutual interaction where reason and emotion tutor each other. Sidney Callahan writes, “The ideal goal is to come to an ethical decision through a personal equilibrium in which emotion and reason are both activated and in accord.”³ First I will look

¹ Charles Chauncy, “Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against” (1742), in Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) 253.

² Mark D. Jordan, “Aquinas’s Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986) 71–97; A. Chadwich Ray, “A Fact About Virtues,” *Thomist* 54 (1990) 429–51.

³ Sidney Callahan, “The Role of Emotion in Ethical Decisionmaking,” *Hastings Center Report*, June/July 1988, 9.

at the rational structure of emotions, then at the role that principles play in the passions and vice-versa. Next I shall ask how the passions are morally assessed according to the standard of "appropriateness." Finally I will inquire whether the passions can be educated.

The Rational Structure of Emotions

Ever since Socrates, the muddle of emotional experience has bedeviled philosophers. In *The Republic* Plato portrays reason as the helmsman of the soul and ship of state, beleaguered by the motley crew of rebellious passions.⁴ For Kant, practical reason finds no truth in the counsel of experienced interests and desires. Contemporary Kantians agree that human flourishing cannot furnish a moral standard, and hence an ethics of virtue is illusory.⁵

Some of today's best analysts despair of finding any rational common definition for the emotions. They "do not form a natural class," writes Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Are they rational or irrational, active or passive, motives or intentional states, vague moods or directed to specific objects, caused by social, genetic, or individual factors?⁶ Rorty emphasizes cultural and personal historical factors in emotions and virtues rather than universal systems of explanation, cautioning that here especially "airtight arguments have vacuous conclusions . . ." ⁷ Emotions have been neglected by analytical philosophy, according to Bernard Williams, because very few general connections can be made between emotions and moral

⁴ The political experience of the philosopher's culture provides different analogues for intrapsychic order. Robert Merrihew Adams rejects Plato's autocratic model of the soul for "something like the American system of representative government with 'divided power,' with opposing tendencies and competing interests retaining an independent voice and influence . . . The everpresent possibility of internal conflict is not only a vexation, . . . it is also a wellspring of vitality and sensitivity, and a check against one-sidedness and fanaticism" ("Involuntary Sins," *Philosophical Review* 94 [1985] 10-11).

⁵ See Sarah Conly, "Flourishing and the Failure of the Ethics of Virtue," in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13: *Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1988) 83-96; David Solomon, "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics," *ibid.* 428-41; and R. Z. Friedman, "Morality and the Morally Informed Life," *ibid.* 149-60. This volume is a superb collection of the entire spectrum of philosophical positions on the ethics of virtue. Also Marcia Baron, "The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984) 197-220, and "Varieties of Ethics of Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985) 47-53; Gregory E. Pence, "Recent Work on Virtues," *APQ* 21 (1984) 281-92; Frank Jackson, "Internal Conflicts in Desires and Morals," *APQ* 22 (1985) 105-14.

⁶ Amelie O. Rorty, ed., *Explaining Emotions* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980) 104; also her "Virtues and Their Vicissitudes," *Midwest Studies* 13, 136-47.

⁷ Rorty, *Explaining* 112.

language. If there is a logic of the heart, it resists formulation in precise rational propositions.⁸

The various accounts of the dynamic structure of emotions generally agree that they refer to some object, dispose the subject to some action, invoke a felt degree of subjective engagement, often accompanied by some physiological reaction, and usually involve some interpretation by reference to beliefs and convictions. Some of these interpretative beliefs are fusions of previous experience and affect stored in the agent's memory, while others are culturally conditioned patterns of evaluation and response. The initial stages of emotional experience are often diffuse and prereflexive, grasping the quality of a situation before discriminating its parts. There is no commonly accepted ranking of affective states, but usage indicates a range of experiences that becomes increasingly focused, self-aware, and purposeful. At the minimal end are moods, feelings, wants; in the mid-range are desires, passions, emotions, and affections; toward the maximal end are dispositions and motives.

Two recent theorists have proposed more fundamental accounts of the emotions, or "passions," as they prefer to call them. Robert C. Solomon's *The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion* sparked the current debate over whether emotions are cognitive judgments or not. Roberto Mangabeira Unger's *Passion: An Essay on Personality* posits a basic "problem of solidarity" that shapes the virtues and vices of human interconnection.⁹

Solomon attacks the myth that passions are blind impulses caused by forces beyond our consciousness. When viewed according to the common "hydraulic model," emotions build up and discharge themselves in bursts of energy that often force us to act in certain ways.¹⁰ They are then considered to be "irrational forces beyond our control, disruptive and stupid, unthinking and counterproductive, against 'our better interests,' and often ridiculous."¹¹ In contrast, Solomon provocatively states that emotions are at bottom rational judgments because "they require an advanced degree of conceptual sophistication, including a conception of

⁸ Bernard Williams, *Philosophical Papers 1956-1972* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1973) 208.

⁹ Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983). Solomon is a philosopher at the University of Texas, Austin. For a more recent popular presentation of his position, see his *About Love: Reinventing Romance for Our Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988) and Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Passion: An Essay on Personality* (New York: Free Press, 1984). Unger is active in Brazilian politics and teaches at Harvard University Law School, where he is a leader of the critical legal-studies movement. See also Sebastian Moore, *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

¹⁰ Solomon, *Passions* 144. ¹¹ *Ibid.* 239.

Self and at least some ability in abstraction. They require at least minimal intelligence and a sense of self-esteem, and they proceed purposefully in accordance with a sometimes extremely complex set of rules and strategies."¹² If he is correct, we must revise several assumptions about emotions and judgments.

By "judgments" we usually mean "convictions about the way things are." Solomon expands this common usage to include a more active dimension. Our convictions endow our world with meaning and value as well as reflect its conditions. Of course, if our hopes and intentions concerning "the way things ought to be" have no relation at all to "the way things are," then our actions will be self-defeating, and in that sense "irrational."

Emotions are not rational in the sense of engendering "reflective awareness." They operate, rather, according to a prereflective, intuitive logic that exhibits the basic feature of rationality, i.e. intelligent purposive activity. They manifest a loose pattern of interconnecting judgments that organize experience in meaningful ways. Emotions have built-in strategies that are rational insofar as they maximize self-esteem (the traditional goal of happiness or human flourishing is too indeterminate for Solomon). The "logic" of the emotions signifies their function in constituting a personal world of meaning. "Every emotion lays down a set of standards, to which the world, other people, most importantly, our Selves are expected to comply."¹³

Solomon distinguishes no less than thirteen different types of judgment that constitute the matrix of any given emotion: its direction (outer/inner), scope or focus, object, criteria, relative status of the parties, evaluations, responsibility, intersubjectivity, distance, mythology, desire, power, and strategy. Because every emotion possesses a set of constitutive judgments about how the world should be and how the agent should act, every passion becomes a principle, in two senses. Following the Latin root *principium*, a principle is a source or origin of purposive action. A principle is also an exemplar or guiding pattern internal to a process. From an examination of 37 emotions, ranging from angst to worship, he concludes that the logic of our emotional reasoning is often fallacious and self-defeating. Faced with such discouraging evidence, the hydraulic model abdicates moral responsibility for emotions. Solomon counters that the attempt to bring emotional scenarios to consciousness enables us to take responsibility for emotions.¹⁴

¹² Ibid. 240. See also his subsequent defense, "On Emotions as Judgments," *APQ* 25 (1988) 183-91.

¹³ Solomon, *Passions* 201.

¹⁴ "There is no simple set of rules concerning the rationality (and irrationality) of our emotions. Most general rules are platitudes . . . There is, however, a general rule of thumb

Roberto Unger wrote on the passions to complement his landmark works on political transformation, *Knowledge and Politics* and *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task*.¹⁵ He aims at a normative account of human affectivity that is intelligible in a postmodern framework. He asks us to “view passion as the whole range of interpersonal encounters in which people do not treat one another as means to one another’s ends.”¹⁶ These noninstrumental relations are “subjectively experienced, felt and understood.”¹⁷ He does not define passion by contrast to rationality or social convention, but re-describes it as “the living out of a specific aspect of the problem of solidarity,” namely the problem posed by the conditions that enable one to assert oneself as a person. “Remember that these conditions are the imperative of engagement with other people and the need to prevent this engagement from turning into subjugation and depersonalization.”¹⁸

The same selves that enable me to be a person also threaten my autonomy. The passions embody this basic tension between mutual longing and reciprocal fear that can never be fully reconciled. Those that fail to subordinate the threat of the other to the promise of engagement are variations of hate: lust, despair, vanity, pride, jealousy, and envy. Love and its derivatives, hope and faith, are the natural passions that affirm engagement with the other in face of the threat of submersion and loss.

Unger’s astute phenomenology of each passion often converges with Solomon’s description, even though his politics of transformation does not concur with Solomon’s existentialism. Both agree that emotions are informed by an ordering structure. Unger’s normative account of the passions revolves around a central theme. “Each passion is conceived as no more than a typical, recurrent place within the same unified experience of mutual longing and jeopardy.”¹⁹ Without the continuous reform of social institutions to lessen domination, politics cannot be liberating. The transforming passions of love, hope, and faith provide the energy to refashion society and individual character, which Unger calls “the frozen self.”²⁰

that will serve well: Always aim at intersubjectivity, avoiding defensiveness wherever possible, never constituting oneself as an inferior, and striving to share our world in bonds of intimacy and friendship” (ibid. 384).

¹⁵ Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Knowledge and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1975); *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1987).

¹⁶ Unger, *Passion* 105–6.

¹⁷ Ibid. 171.

¹⁸ Ibid. 115.

¹⁹ Ibid. 173.

²⁰ “. . . the events of passion always do move beyond the limits imposed on them by established institutions and ideas . . . Though society informs these lessons [of passion], it does not inform them entirely. The unshaped part—the deviations, the anomalies, the surprises—provides the visionary imagination with the materials for subversive insight” (ibid. 258).

Principled Passions and Passionate Principles

Psychologists and philosophers energetically dispute the claim that emotions play a role in judgments and vice-versa. In psychology, a decade-long debate has simmered over R. B. Zajonc's contention that "affect and cognition are under the control of separate and partially independent systems . . . and that both constitute independent sources of effects in information processing."²¹

Solomon's view that emotions are judgments drew considerable opposition from some philosophers. Stephen R. Leighton holds that "Emotion is not an assessment; nor is it any set of assessments. Thought and emotion are logically distinct."²² Because emotions can occur without evaluative judgments and judgments can occur in the absence of emotion, Leighton concludes that at least some emotions are not dependent on judgments. Michael Stocker asserts that emotions are not judgments or logical assessments because they are not always based on beliefs about evidence. Instead, "the significant relations between emotions and thoughts are better understood as forms of *attention* and *focus* than as involving evidence and truth."²³

Solomon replied that his critics' notion of judgment is excessively intellectualist. The logic of emotions differs from the inferential logic of evidence and assessment invoked by his critics. For example, "one crucial ingredient in envy may be a judgment of one's own lack of self-worth. . . . But such abbreviated judgments do not capture the totality of emotion."²⁴ That specific judgment may be emotionally urgent but is embedded in a context of other judgments that may not be. "An emotion is the entire system of judgments, and the judgments that constitute the emotion are emotional by virtue of their place in that system."²⁵

²¹ R. B. Zajonc, "Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences," *American Psychologist* 35 (1980) 151; opposed by S. Rachman, "The Primacy of Affect: Some Theoretical Implications," *Behavioral Research & Therapy* 19 (1981) 279-90 and by Richard S. Lazarus, "Thoughts on the Relations between Emotion and Cognition," *AP* 37 (1982) 1019-1024, and "On the Primacy of Cognition," *AP* 39 (1984) 124-129; S. Rachman, "A Reassessment of the 'Primacy of Affect,'" *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 8 (1984) 579-84; Michael J. Mahoney, "Integrating Cognition, Affect, and Action: A Comment," *ibid.* 585-89; Leslie S. Greenberg and Jeremy D. Safran, "Hot Cognition—Emotion Coming in from the Cold: A Reply to Rachman and Mahoney," *ibid.* 591-98. Even a casual reading of the philosophical tradition would have made this discussion less constricted and much more sophisticated.

²² Stephen R. Leighton, "A New View of Emotion," *APQ* 22 (1985) 133-41.

²³ Michael Stocker, "Emotional Thoughts," *APQ* 24 (1987) 59-69. For a somewhat broader view of the influence that certain emotional dispositions have in intellectual life see Stocker's "Intellectual Desire, Emotion, and Action," in Rorty, *Explaining Emotions* 323-38.

²⁴ Solomon, "Emotions as Judgments" 186.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 187.

We do not consciously or logically move from these judgments to an evaluative conclusion; the connection between them and a specific emotional occurrence is only “loosely analytical.” Background beliefs and judgments reside in the agent habitually as dynamic structures of experience which are continuously renewed. Finally, it should be obvious that we do not experience emotions as systems of judgments; “it is rather the world as it is constituted through those judgments”²⁶ that we experience.

Thought and emotion are logically distinct, therefore, only if one restricts logic to conscious progression from one clear proposition to another. Many judgments have desire built into them; and that desire is a stimulus to a specific emotion. The person has an initial felt qualitative grasp of the whole situation (“This isn’t fair!”), tries out various paradigms and memories to interpret it (“This is just like the time when . . .”), and experiences the scenario of characteristic action that is urged by the emotion (“Someone’s going to pay for this.”). Anger looks for someone to punish in order to get just satisfaction. Additional considerations of consequences, social expectations, interpersonal commitments are often necessary to determine what appropriate behavior will be. For Solomon, emotions are rational if they support self-esteem and intimacy. Whether the emotionally charged response is rational needs to be distinguished from whether it seems plausible, or “logical.” Hence, in some if not most situations, my anger may be reasonable, but acts of retaliation would be irrational.

Not only do passions have a cognitive or “principled” aspect; moral principles usually have a passionate dimension as well. Psychologist Jerome Kagan holds that universal moral principles originate in emotion rather than cognition: “Beneath the extraordinary variety in surface behavior and consciously articulated ideals, there is a set of emotional states that form the bases for a limited number of universal moral categories that transcend time and locality.”²⁷ To those who fear that passions would make an unstable foundation for principles, philosopher Jonathan Bennett replies that this basis enables principles to weather the changes in one’s moods. Principles are “embodiments of one’s best

²⁶ Ibid. 190–1.

²⁷ Jerome Kagan, *The Nature of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 118–19, cited in Charles M. Shelton *Morality of the Heart: A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 74. Shelton’s work discusses the role of the natural capacity for empathy as the psychological foundation for morality with special reference to the work of Martin Hoffman. Although philosophers today prefer to treat the social construction of emotion, others point to “given” aspects of human psychology or society that originate emotion (although almost all are loathe to assert any metaphysical foundation for these givens). See Martha C. Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelean Approach,” in *Midwest Studies* 13 (see n. 5) 32–53; and David B. Wong, “On Flourishing and Finding One’s Identity in Community,” *ibid.* 324–41.

feelings, one's best broadest and keenest sympathies. On that view principles can help one across intervals when one's feelings are at less than their best, i.e. through periods of misanthropy or meanness or self-centeredness or depression or anger."²⁸

Moral theologian James Gaffney questions the distinction made by some of his colleagues between the normative truth value of moral principles and their motivating (or paraenetic) character. Stating a general moral principle always involves a commendation of the same norm. Principles are meant to engage their audience and motivate appropriate action. They also have truth value, a point that emotivism misses when it reduces all moral discourse to motivational appeal."²⁹ Finally, we expect a mature moral agent to experience strong emotional reactions when deeply held values are threatened or violated. It would be aberrant to know the principles of justice with great clarity and yet remain unmoved in the face of human rights violations. "Deficit of affect" at this level is not the hallmark of the rational person but of the sociopath.

Appropriateness: Criterion of Emotional Success

The reciprocal interplay of passion and principle, emotion and judgment, forces us to ask how we should assess emotions. Arguments are usually measured according to internal and external standards: an argument whose conclusion follows logically from its premises is *valid*, whereas a conclusion that adequately corresponds with the actual situation is *true*. In the past decade, the term "appropriate" has emerged to characterize both the internal plausibility of emotions (their "validity") and their external adequacy (their "truth"). Three theses on emotion will indicate more clearly what appropriateness means in reference to emotions. Each will qualify Solomon's assertion that emotions are judgments.

a. Emotions are evaluative attitudes

Patricia S. Greenspan examines the common experience of emotional ambivalence and finds that "ambivalence seems to be possible in persons not so irrational as to hold genuinely contrary judgments."³⁰ Contrary judgments demand resolution since it is not possible for both to be true. Since, however, we can experience contrary emotions that need not be resolved, it seems to follow that emotions cannot be judgments.

²⁸ Jonathan Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," *Philosophy* 49 (1974), cited in Callahan, "Role of Emotion," 13.

²⁹ James Gaffney, *Matters of Faith and Morals* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1987) 146.

³⁰ Patricia S. Greenspan, "A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion," in Rorty, ed., *Explaining Emotion* 223.

Greenspan probes the case of mixed feelings that occur when a colleague and friend receives an award that another person half-expected to win; the latter is both disappointed at having been passed over and glad because the friend has been successful. Both emotions are reasonable and their ambivalence is not incompatible with a basic rationality. Greenspan prefers to characterize “emotions as *attitudes*—attitudes that generally correspond to judgments, but which seem to exhibit a logic of their own.”³¹

Although we demand that judgments fit all the evidence, we require only “minimal rationality” from emotions. She writes that “an emotion seems to be appropriate relative to a particular set of grounds, and not necessarily a unified evaluation of one’s total body of evidence.” The emotion needs justification by *some* adequate reasons, even if one experiences a contrary emotion supported by the preponderance of one’s reasons. (As when traces of self-pity and envy linger in the face of one’s genuine appreciation that the colleague-friend has been awarded the prize.)

Where the logic of judgments aims at truth, that of emotions aims at *appropriateness*. However, appropriateness is not strictly analogous to truth, because “contrary emotions might both be appropriate for different reasons.”³² Since emotions usually depend on selective, partial aspects of the situation, a rational person can tolerate contrary emotions. Conflicting emotions can spring from the capacity to interpret a situation differently, and that conflict can be creative. “Commitment to different points of view, in short, can motivate behavior unlikely to arise from emotional detachment.”³³

b. Emotions are serious concern-based construals

Robert C. Roberts prefers to understand emotions as “construals” rather than judgments. A construal is “a mental event or state in which one thing is grasped in terms of something else.”³⁴ We understand the unfamiliar by comparing it to what is familiar. Indeed, a great number of our experiences are construals, “synthetic crossings of percepts, im-

³¹ Ibid. 234.

³² Ibid. 236. In an earlier essay Bernard Williams remarks, “I shall try to show a point of involvement of the emotions in what may seem an independent criterion of moral sincerity—the only one, I imagine, which is likely to be thought capable of carrying the weight of the concept by itself. This is the criterion of appropriate action. That consistent or appropriate action is the criterion of moral sincerity is an idea that has been constantly stressed in recent discussion” (“Morality and the Emotions,” in *Philosophical Papers* 221).

³³ Greenspan, “Mixed Feelings” 240.

³⁴ Robert C. Roberts, “What an Emotion Is: A Sketch,” *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988) 190.

ages, thoughts and concepts,” whose precise structure is difficult to specify. Emotions are construals based on serious personal concerns that have at least the appearance of truth.³⁵ Desires and judgments do not “come home” as emotions until they are used to interpret the self. I may look at an experience of personal wrong-doing in an emotionally detached way without drawing the full moral inferences. I do not experience the emotion of guilt until I construe myself and my situation in terms of the accusing facts and my simultaneous desire to live a morally upright life.³⁶

Thinking of emotions as construals explains the flexibility that rational persons have about interpreting emotions. They have more options about their emotions than about their judgments because they can choose to construe the situation in different ways. For instance, if I am trying to rescue my daughter from the second floor of our burning home, I may combat feelings of fear by refocusing the situation in some appropriate way. Even while judging that my perch on a shaky ladder is dangerous, I can choose to concentrate on my mission not as a threat to my life and limb but as a rescue mission to save my daughter. “The former construal is a form of fear, while the latter is not; both are quite compatible with the judgment that my daughter and I are severely endangered.” Here, the virtuous disposition of courage widens the possibilities for interpretation and action. “The courageous person has construal options, and thus emotional flexibility, that the coward lacks.”³⁷

In this reading, the notion of appropriateness is quite pragmatic. The factual possibilities of the situation must discipline my construal or the task cannot be accomplished. If the wobbly ladder will not bear the additional weight of my daughter, no amount of focusing on my mission can counter that awful fact.

c. Appropriateness

Finally, an emotion is appropriate, if and only if the evoking object or situation warrants the emotion.

³⁵ Ibid. 198. See Robert C. Roberts, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) for the ways in which concerns and interests dispose to emotions just as much as beliefs and concepts do.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 199. Roberts makes the interesting observation that love is not strictly an emotion. Too many and varied responses flow from the different forms of love: that which lovers have for each other, that which parents have for children and vice-versa, or what friends have for one another. Depending on the condition of the beloved, the lover may feel joy, gratitude, rage, hope, indignation, grief, and many other emotions. “Love in this sense is not an emotion, but a disposition to a range of emotions. Which emotion occurs is a function of how the beloved is construed” (ibid. 203). The emotion of sympathy is in part based on how we construe the one who is suffering, particularly whether the suffering is the result of choice. See Daniel Putnam, “Sympathy and Ethical Judgments: A Reconsideration,” *APQ* 24 (1987) 261–66.

Ronald de Sousa writes that appropriateness does not depend on how plausible the emotion seems to the agent. It may well flow smoothly from the agent's values and preferences, but they may be biased, distorted, out of touch. Appropriateness refers to the "success" of an emotion that is analogous to its truth rather than validity.³⁸ Just as reflection on beliefs pushes on to some judgment about their truth, reflection on emotions aims at action that is warranted by the possibilities of the situation seen in the light of the interests of the agent. De Sousa resists assimilating emotions to judgments, desires or actions because their respective proper objects are different in kind. *Reasoning* aims at a judgment concerning truth; *wanting* aims at "actual desirability or goodness"; *action* is successful when it achieves the agent's purpose.

Emotions direct our attention to specific features of the situation; in other words, they indicate "*salience*: what to attend to, what to inquire about."³⁹ No logic or rational calculation can determine salience. Pure reason and mere wanting leave gaps in determining what to do and what to believe. Emotion fills those gaps. "On my view, emotions ask the questions which judgment answers with beliefs." Every question, however, shapes the answer: "In this way emotions can be said to be judgments rather than facts in the way that scientific paradigms might be said to be 'judgments': they are what we see the world 'in terms of.' But they cannot be articulated propositions."⁴⁰

The shifts of emotion are largely shifts of salience. These shifts are primarily intuitive, and it is difficult to formulate reasons for such shifts of attention. Being intuitive does not mean that they are beyond our control, since we do have some control over where we focus our attention.⁴¹ Hence, it makes sense to hold ourselves and others responsible, at least to some degree, for emotions.⁴²

What warrants a given emotion as appropriate? Recall that de Sousa links appropriateness to the evoking situation rather than to the desires of the agent. Emotions are not innately patterned nor built up from primitive feelings. Instead, we develop our emotional repertoire by association with *paradigm scenarios*, "drawn first from our daily life as small

³⁸ Ronald de Sousa, "The Rationality of Emotions," in Rorty, ed., *Explaining Emotion* 127–51.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 136. This leads to his hypothesis: "Emotions are determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies" (*ibid.* 137).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 138.

⁴¹ "Intuition" is making a comeback from the abuse it suffered earlier in this century from the intuitionists. John Kekes does not claim that moral intuitions are unconditional, automatic, infallible, or self-evident. Facts fall into certain patterns of value immediately, but this initial sense of appropriateness may be criticized or revised. See his "Moral Intuition," *APQ* 23 (1986) 83–93.

⁴² See Robert Merrihew Adams, "Involuntary Sins" (n. 4 above).

children, later reinforced by the stories and fairy tales to which we are exposed, and, later still, supplemented and refined by literature and art."⁴³ These scenarios provide the characteristic objects of emotions and the normal responses to the situation. Some emotions rely on rather developed paradigms (the intricate comparisons and delusions of pride, for example) while others are more primitive (such as lust or terror). We size up our experience by means of these "gestalts" as they indicate what to pay attention to in the situation, what to expect and what to infer.

Although we learn these paradigm scenarios from our culture, they are not immune to criticism. Just as we can expand, revise or reject concepts we have learned, so maturing emotionally requires similar revision. Racist or sexist emotions and responses may possess a certain minimal rationality for members of a certain culture because they arise in situations that fit the biased scenarios inculcated by the culture. However, we recognize that biased emotions are inappropriate when other competing paradigms are brought to bear on the situation or when the scenario becomes obsolete because situations no longer fit it. These new scenarios are preferable because "the situation is viewed from a more comprehensive perspective. The attempt to restructure one's emotions by 'consciousness raising' is based on this possibility—without which, I suspect, there could be no such thing as moral development."⁴⁴

Emotional rationality, therefore, turns in part on the fit between situation and scenario. Emotions are irrational when we perceive a situation in terms of a paradigm scenario that it does not objectively resemble. Appropriateness is based upon the relation of "fittingness": "It is in terms of the relation between the evoking situation and the formal object—the quality that is tied to the paradigm situation—that the appropriateness or intrinsic rationality of an emotion is assessed." An emotion is "minimally rational" if it fits the given scenario. Its fuller rationality can only be assessed "first, by determining whether the evoking situation is actually an instantiation of the paradigm, and secondly, by confronting it with other applicable paradigms."⁴⁵

Consequences provide the major test in deciding which scenarios should have preference. Fundamental questions in theology today can be

⁴³ Ibid. 142.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 145. Donald L. Gelpi, S.J. has argued persuasively that Bernard Lonergan's model of conversion should be amended to include "affective conversion" in which one takes responsibility for one's emotional development along psychologically sound lines. Affective conversion involves identifying and repudiating the biased archetypes that have distorted one's emotional life. See Gelpi, *Inculturating North American Theology: An Experiment in Foundational Method* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), esp. chap. 2.

⁴⁵ Adams, "Involuntary Sins" 149.

described as choices between paradigm scenarios. For instance, do I want to perpetuate a world of rugged individualism that preserves my elite status, or should I shift paradigms and “take the view from below,” as liberation theologians urge us to do? We appeal to cognitive considerations to work out preferences and hierarchies among our wants and values. “So with emotions: the chief task of establishing rational transitions between emotions, and rational emotional responses to situations where several scenarios compete, involves determining hierarchies between applicable scenarios.”⁴⁶

Amelie Rorty spells out another criterion for emotional appropriateness. Besides having rational warrants for appropriateness in the situation, an emotion must be “well formed to conduce to thriving.”⁴⁷ The person of practical wisdom has a character with “appropriate habits arising from well-formed perceptions and desires.” These virtuous habits serve to attune perception to actions that lead to genuine thriving. Ideally, each phase is interconnected: “rationality (as defined by truthfulness supported by validity) is a central guide to appropriateness, and appropriateness a central guide to flourishing.”⁴⁸

No theory of virtue or general moral principles can produce the specific solution that is uniquely appropriate.⁴⁹ Nor is there any checklist of steps to arrive at the apt action in a given situation. Well-ordered emotions, sensitive perceptions and sound habits, accountability to a sound moral community, the willingness to consider the most extensive ramifications of the action, self-knowledge about one’s biases and preferences—all these skills anchor practical reflection in the actual situation. Rationality alone cannot appreciate the complex contours of particular persons in particular situations or dictate how to do the right action to the right person in the right way to the right degree.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid. 147. On this point of conflicting scenarios, Kekes writes “intuitions receive their force and justification from the moral tradition in which their possessors have been educated. Yet, if a moral tradition is pluralistic, as a sound one must be, there will be a multiplicity of intuitions conflicting with each other” (“Moral Intuition” 91).

⁴⁷ Amelie O. Rorty, *Mind in Action* (Boston: Beacon, 1988) 131.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 134.

⁴⁹ See David K. O’Connor, “Aristotelean Justice as Personal Virtue,” in *Midwest Studies* 13 (see n. 5) 417–27; “. . . within an [ethics of virtue] it is not the theory of the virtues that is supposed to be primarily action guiding, but the virtues themselves.” See also David Solomon, “Internal Objections,” *ibid.* 439.

⁵⁰ See Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) esp. chap. 2. For a comprehensive treatment of responsibility ethics that seeks the “fitting” rather than the universally permissible action, I doubt if any work has surpassed H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

Educating the Emotions

Learning what to fear and what to admire, when to be indignant and when to show compassion, may be even more important for moral education than inculcating principles. We hold others accountable for not knowing when or how to react appropriately and blame ourselves for falling into the habits that untutored emotions lead to. Getting angry at the wrong people or being nasty in envious speech are not only failures of etiquette, they are morally reprehensible. One "ought to know better." Although moral education of children requires setting down clear rules, how does one educate their emotional responses? This may be the central moral task of every culture, including the Christian community. Since emotions combine volitional, affective, and cognitive elements, we must attend to beliefs, habits, and paradigms in educating them.

Transforming the emotions certainly goes on at the individual level. Bernard Williams writes that "the most obvious influence of rational thought or advice on the emotions [is] that of convincing one that a given object is no proper or appropriate object of that emotion."⁵¹ Self-scrutiny and change of beliefs, however, are notoriously inefficient devices for transforming emotions; certain emotions, like free-floating anxiety or persistent rage, seek out ever fresh occasions to justify their continued sway. The most dramatic form of emotional education may be psychotherapy in which irrational and muddled scenarios are exposed in order to make room for healthier paradigms that lead to more humane responses.⁵²

Roger Scruton distinguishes universal emotions from particular ones and describes the corresponding forms of education. Admiration, indignation and contempt are directed toward universal objects that are abstract and somewhat impersonal. The cowardice I despise in one person would be despicable in anyone. "The object of my contempt is the particular—James—as an instance of the universal. What I despise is James's cowardice, say, or childishness, and I would feel just the same toward anyone else who showed the same defect" (unless of course there are mitigating circumstances in the second instance). We educate for the universal emotion of courage by citing instances of cowardice and showing

⁵¹ Williams, "Morality" 224.

⁵² "The working model of moral conflict has been that of emotion warring against reason, with only reason's mastery offering trustworthy guidance. A more careful analysis of the regressed state would see that the moral conflict is usually a case of one immature thinking-emotive moral scenario in conflict with another more wholly owned and appropriately mature moral scenario. Rational tutoring of self and others assesses the inappropriate responses and substitutes others" (Callahan "Role of Emotion" 12). Changing fundamental attitudes may be more like a shift in aesthetic appreciation that is not irrational or purely subjective but far more than a deliberate revamping of principles. See E. J. Lemmon, "Moral Dilemmas," *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962) 139–58.

the proper response from which the student will then generalize. We educate values by providing people “with a sense of what is appropriate not just here and now but universally.”⁵³

Particular emotions call for a different pedagogy. Love, hate, or grief are inextricably linked to particular persons. There is no obligation to grieve the death of anyone like one grieves the death of a parent. Where universal emotions seem to abstract from the particularity of both subject and object, particular emotions have “an intimate connection with one’s sense and conception of *oneself*.”⁵⁴ While I may delight in the particular humor of my beloved, I am under no obligation to love passionately anyone else who may be equally witty, since that other person lacks this unique bond to me. How, then, are we to learn what is appropriate action in respect to these highly personal emotions?

Even particular emotions can take on a more general character when they are guided by cultural patterns that indicate appropriate feelings and expressions. Scruton describes how in the *Odyssey* the Greek burial ritual instructed Odysseus in responding to his dying companion Elpenor. Since there is a close connection between knowing what to feel and knowing what to do, “a practice that intimates to one what to do might also be instrumental in determining one’s knowledge of what to feel.” Although Odysseus’ grief is uniquely his own, the ritual connects his feelings to the shared humanity of the larger culture. The ceremony roots his feelings in an ongoing history, hence it makes the grief somewhat universal and channels its expression into ways that are experienced as right and proper. “This sense of ‘universality’ is present whenever some idea of the validity of the sentiment becomes an active and serious part of the sentiment itself, informing not just the behavior of the subject, but the very description under which the object is perceived.”⁵⁵ Participating in a common culture may be less common today, but for those who do, even their particular emotions can be invested with a type of certainty, a sense of satisfaction and appropriateness through connection with the larger patterns of meaning provided by the culture.⁵⁶

Emotions are important in sharpening one’s moral perceptions and evoking novel approaches to moral problems. Sidney Callahan writes:

Many moral revolutions have been initiated by empathy felt for previously

⁵³ Roger Scruton, “Emotion, Practical Knowledge and Common Culture,” in Rorty, *Explaining Emotions* 526.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 529.

⁵⁶ For a sophisticated reflection on contemporary mores and paradigms in the manner of Montaigne, see Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1984). A number of commentators note that it is much easier to describe the failure of virtues than the virtues themselves; no one seems able to explain quite why that is so. See Gregory E. Pence, “Recent Work on Virtues,” *APQ* 21/4 (1984) 281–297.

excluded groups: slaves, women, workers, children, the handicapped, experimental subjects, patients in institutions. As I emotionally respond to another person or group, I may be forced to confront a conflicting moral attitude concerning the group . . . [This] inconsistency and unsettling discrepancy . . . can then prompt a creative moral readjustment.⁵⁷

It may be impossible to educate for justice without resistance since few of us welcome those who stretch our emotional horizons.⁵⁸

Philosophers rarely mention two central points made by Christian theologians: the necessity of transforming and reorienting the emotions away from egocentricity, and the actual workings of paradigm scenarios and ritual in a specific culture.⁵⁹

Religious traditions have resources for schooling the affections that philosophers lack. For instance, the stories of saints and heroes should move religious persons beyond the limits of “moral minimalism” by showing the trajectory of moral development that is possible under the empowerment of divine assistance. The prospect of final accountability before God adds the weight of eternity to present moral choices—a not insignificant motive at times. The knowledge of God’s graciousness can also defuse a tyrannical superego that can warp even the finest moral intentions and motives.⁶⁰

Certainly Christian communities provide both rituals and paradigm scenarios to educate emotions and indicate appropriate feelings and responses. The Christian Eucharist should constantly renew a complex of appropriate emotional dispositions in the participants, from repentance and gratitude to compassion and generosity. Sacramental marriage and funeral liturgies aim to form the affections along the lines of covenant and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Scripture is replete with paradigms that are narrative, lyrical, symbolic, and parabolic. Many facets of the New Testament ethos stretch the horizon of ordinary affections: the command to love the stranger and the enemy, the “great reversal” of the beatitudes, the universality of God’s mercy that Christians are called to imitate, the story of Jesus whose death and resurrection become the central metaphor of Christian expe-

⁵⁷ Callahan “Role of Emotion” 12.

⁵⁸ See Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) for an excellent collection of essays from theologians around the world, who articulate the oppression and aspirations of people who are often invisible to the dominant culture.

⁵⁹ See novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985).

⁶⁰ See David L. Norton, “Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character,” in *Midwest Studies* 13, 180–95; Lawrence A. Blum, “Moral Exemplars: Reflections on Schindler, the Trocmes, and Others,” *ibid.* 196–221.

rience. Particular emotions are “schooled” by the images of God and Christ, as well as by the language of prayer and liturgical actions.⁶¹

It is regrettable that moral theology has neglected the role that emotions play in the moral life. The legal paradigm that dominated the history of theological ethics since Augustine was reinforced first by a rationalist natural law approach and then, in some circles, by a Kantian ethics of principles. Even the efforts by narrative and biblical theologians to establish alternative paradigms have not carefully worked out how convictions, stories, and metaphors shape emotions. Too often, Catholic treatments of the virtues ignore specifically Christian experience in favor of very general philosophical analysis.

Should Christian education of the affections aim at transforming specific human emotions by construing them in a distinctive way? Charles M. Shelton describes how human empathy can furnish the fundamental disposition for Christian moral life. While insisting on the fully human character of this capacity, he shows how it finds a specific direction under the tutelage of biblical imagery (Jesus as the compassionate high priest in Hebrews, the Good Samaritan of Luke, and the body imagery of First Corinthians). “What is needed is some frame of reference that grounds our emotions and empathic expressions. Stated simply, what is needed is a transformation of empathic experience.”⁶²

Unfinished Business

Further work needs to be done on a number of fronts. We may never get a clinically exact description of emotions as experienced because they synthesize such a wide range of psychological, cognitive, and physiological data with fusions of memory and affect that have not been encoded in language. However, this theoretical limitation should not discourage continued investigation of a number of issues: How do emotions support moral commitments? How are they socially formed through language and custom? Can one discover emotions sufficiently common to various traditions to avoid “the wastelands of relativism”? How should one sensitively and critically determine one’s personal mix of the various sets of preferences that are mandated by the different “worlds” we inhabit?

Perhaps we need to invent a term such as “macro-emotions” to help uncover the emotions that characterize groups, movements, and eras to such an extent that they reign unnoticed. Fear of communism shaped

⁶¹ See Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

⁶² Shelton, *Morality of the Heart* 102; see also his *Morality and the Adolescent* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). For another excellent work that integrates psychology, morality, and spirituality, see Wilkie Au, S.J., *By Way of the Heart: Toward a Holistic Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

American values and institutions for decades, surfacing most visibly during the career of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Only at the end of the eighties did the pundits acknowledge it as the decade of greed. From the White House to the shopping mall, the gospel of endless consumption was preached—with predictable results.

The nineties may be the decade of anger, if the rhetoric of advocacy and the disillusionment of a weary public are any clue. Contempt for the poor is the byproduct of a culture of greed; and one suspects that those who celebrate the redemptive potential of righteous rage may unwittingly produce a sizable amount of resentment and envy. Is that the necessary price to raise consciousness and galvanize the will of the oppressed? How does concern for society's common good unite groups who champion a particular constituency? Unger is one of the few social critics who has examined both the promise and pitfalls of macro-emotions in a culture.⁶³

In a recent work J. Giles Milhaven notes that the New Testament and Thomas Aquinas agree with Aristotle that the expression of anger is legitimate in certain circumstances.⁶⁴ He then asks a most challenging question: Is vindictive anger ever morally right? Not anger for betterment or anger for liberation, but the anger that seeks to make the offender suffer for the wrong inflicted.⁶⁵

Paul Lauritzen evaluates retributive anger differently. Following the cognitivist approach seen above, he shows how Christian beliefs can lead to a reinterpretation and transformation of anger. The beliefs that God is in charge of history, that we are not called to redress every evil, and that some events that appear to be harmful may not be so, can lead to "a significant revision of the norms governing anger."⁶⁶

The two interpretations show that the search for appropriate emotion and response does not yield necessary or universal conclusions. One can

⁶³ For a brilliant description of the interplay of justified indignation and envy in the struggle against oppression, see Unger, *Passion* 211–20.

⁶⁴ J. Giles Milhaven, *Good Anger* (Kansas City, Mo: Sheed & Ward, 1989).

⁶⁵ When the victim retaliates, "the pain is the offender's experience of unsuspected power and freedom of his victim. Others stress that the pain is desirable because the pain is the offender's experience of what he put his victim through" (ibid. 181). See Beverly Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," in *Making the Connections* (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 3–21.

⁶⁶ Paul Lauritzen, "Emotions and Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988) 320. He cites Kierkegaard's reading of the story of the Prodigal Son that suggests a fundamental transformation of anger and resentment as well as a change in the estimate of its appropriateness: "In other words, the model of moral relations governing the father's reaction is not one premised on the presupposition of mutual threat, but on the presupposition of mutual love. In this situation, the retributive emotion of anger is as unnecessary as it is out of place, anger simply doesn't have a home here" (ibid. 321). He follows Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 209.

also conclude that the Christian tradition provides more than one paradigm scenario for assessing situations of grievance. Which of them is most apt cannot be determined apart from the theological considerations that create a ranking of paradigms, nor can it be determined apart from the actual discernment of a virtuous person in the situation. Nevertheless, the very fact that we can argue about the cogency or usefulness of the approaches proves the point that emotions are not irrational but corrigible, analyzable and, to some extent, educable.

Perhaps the last and best piece of advice to ethicists comes from Sidney Callahan: "I would be especially aware that the graver moral danger arises from a deficit of moral emotion than from emotional excess."⁶⁷

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RELIGION AND POLITICAL LIFE

The debate on the proper relation of religion to politics has continued vigorously since these "Notes" last addressed the topic.¹ The influence of religious communities in public policy debates on abortion remains the most heated practical point of contention. Other practical issues such as economic justice for the poor, homelessness, sex education, health services in relation to the AIDS crisis, and U.S. military policy in the Persian Gulf have also received considerable attention. But during the past few years a number of authors in the fields of moral, political, and legal philosophy have been exploring the basic theoretical grounding for an understanding of the relation of religion and political life in a democratic society. In order to illuminate the larger context within which practical issues are assessed, it will be useful to step back from the details of specific controversies to consider this developing discussion in moral theory and jurisprudence.

Three general positions in the debate can be identified. The first is a liberal democratic stance with secularist implications. John Rawls represents this position in a moderate form; Richard Rorty pushes it to radically secularist conclusions. The second endorses the fundamental presuppositions of liberal democratic theory while seeking to provide greater public space for religion. This is the position developed by Kent Greenawalt. The third offers both a philosophical and theological critique of standard liberal democratic theory and seeks to justify a much greater public role for religious convictions. This is the position defended by

⁶⁷ Callahan, "Role of Emotion" 14.

¹ "Notes on Moral Theology: 1987," *TS* 49 (1988) 67-150, at 68-89.