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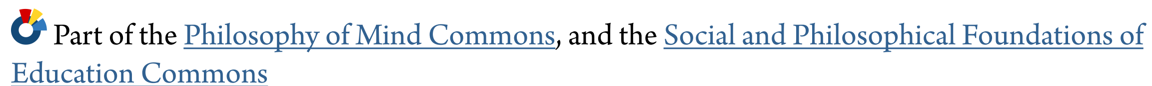
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The Education of the Emotions

Abstract
Human emotion is, to some, an embarrassment. They regard our emotional aspect as not fully human; like some grotesque offspring, it should be hidden away in our psychic cellar or gotten rid of altogether. Our emotions (or "passions" or "affections") are powerful, but they may be kept at bay by our fair child, reason. The enmity seems natural; reason represents the orderly, the proper, the Apollonian; emotion is the disruptive, the capricious, the Dionysian. The accomplishments of cool reason may be consumed in the heat of passion. To give vent to emotion is thus to turn irrational and to reveal that one has at least temporarily lost a clear and compelling vision of the rational cosmic order. Such a view is held by Spinoza, for example, who defines a passion as "a confused idea," and who sets a chapter on "the strength of the emotions" which he called "Of Human Bandage." In the same spirit, Marcus Aurelius warns:

"This is the chief thing: Do not be perturbed, for all things are according to the law of nature... Let that part of your soul which leads and governs be undisturbed by motions of the flesh... let it set a wall around itself and keep those emotions in their place."

To others, emotion is a delight. They prescribe the relaxing of reason in a warm bath of passion. The Romantics see reason as pale, conventional, and imprisoning, while emotion is intense, natural, and liberating. Sometimes, however, this celebration of the emotions is only instrumental, as with the Orphics, who would indulge in frenzied orgies as a sacrament of purification, a ritual catharsis of the baser passions. Yet even these emotional enthusiasts assume a fundamental opposition of reason and emotion. [*excerpt*]

Keywords
human emotion, affections, passion, reason, educated emotion

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THE EDUCATION OF THE EMOTIONS

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Human emotion is, to some, an embarrassment. They regard our emotional aspect as not fully human; like some grotesque offspring, it should be hidden away in our psychic cellar or gotten rid of altogether. Our emotions (or "passions" or "affections") are powerful, but they may be kept at bay by our fair child, reason. The enmity seems natural: reason represents the orderly, the proper, the Apollonian; emotion is the disruptive, the capricious, the Dionysian. The accomplishments of cool reason may be consumed in the heat of passion. To give vent to emotion is thus to turn irrational and to reveal that one has at least temporarily lost a clear and compelling vision of the rational cosmic order. Such a view is held by Spinoza, for example, who defines a passion as "a confused idea," and who sets a chapter on "the power of the intellect" which he calls "Of Human Freedom" against a chapter on "the strength of the emotions" which he calls "Of Human Bondage."[1] In the same spirit, Marcus Aurelius warns:

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> Let that part of your soul which leads and governs be undisturbed by motions of the flesh...let it set a wall around itself and keep those emotions in their place.[2]

To others, emotion is a delight. They prescribe the relaxing of reason in a warm bath of passion. The Romantics see reason as pale, conventional, and imprisoning, while emotion is intense, natural, and liberating. Sometimes, however, this celebration of the emotions is only instrumental, as with the Orphics, who would indulge in frenzied orgies as a sacrament of purification, a ritual catharsis of the baser passions. Yet even these emotional enthusiasts assume a fundamental opposition of reason and emotion.

We have inherited this opposition. It is evident in our partitioning of educational territory into cognitive and affective domains. But we strive to shed old superstitions and seek to stultify neither our passions nor our reason; on the

contrary, we champion an education that develops both cognition and affection. Still, despite the on-going acclaim for affective education, talk of "educating the emotions" remains somehow odd, as though the phrase harbors a category-mistake or an ellipsis. Are emotions educable? Can education raise the quality of our joy or regret? How does educated anger, fear, or resentment, say, differ from the uneducated form? This oddity is, I believe, traceable to our persistent misunderstanding of the nature of emotion. I shall first outline the features of an emotion, then discuss several ways of construing "emotive education." My aim is to elucidate and elevate a conception of emotive education that challenges the estrangement of cognition and emotion, a conceptual divorce which has left us, as Scheffler points out, with "unfeeling knowledge and mindless arousal."[3]

WHAT IS AN EMOTION?

Anger, fear, anxiety, regret, joy, grief, embarrassment, resentment, indignation—the emotions are diverse and subtle. They are temporary alterations in ourselves, more fleeting than moods or dispositions. We think of them as feelings, private experiences that "come over" us and submerge our deliberation and autonomy. When a person has "lost control of his emotions" and is "overcome" by them, the implication is that he is not responsible for his attitudes or actions.[4] They well up spontaneously and we undergo them passively. Such is the common image—and the basis of our problem.

Reflect on this example of an emotional experience:

> A man sees a funnel-shaped dark cloud approaching and realizes it is a potentially destructive tornado. He feels frightened. Various bodily changes ensue, including increased strength and rate of heartbeat, paling, gooseflesh, and drying of the throat. These changes are reflected in his bodily sensations, which also include such things as a sinking sensation in the stomach and sporadic local chills. He has strong tendencies to run away and to protect his goods and loved ones, tendencies which may or may not find expression, depending on circumstances. He finds it difficult to think about anything else or to concentrate on the work at hand.[5]

Generalizing from this case, one may isolate five components of emotional states, each of which has seemed the essence of emotion to some theorist. Each component deserves comment.

1. There is an *evaluation*, an appraisal of a specific object, a cognition of something as importantly related to one's desires and values. The dark cloud is appraised as destructive and potentially harmful to one's life, loved ones, and property. This appraisal is clearly not the result of extended conscious deliberation; it is done unconsciously and in a moment. But it is an appraisal nonetheless and its logic is evaluative. Often an emotive appraisal does involve an

overt deliberation, as when one tries to decide whether one should be angry at being mistreated. Evaluations mesh facts and values; they are a species of cognitions. If emotions begin with appraisals, they are to that extent cognitive and manifest one's values and perceptions. Moreover, appraisals even when unconscious are active operations and not happenings which one passively undergoes.

2. There are *feelings* of a specific sort: in this case, feelings of fright. There is in consciousness the presence of a distinctive felt quality which we have learned to call "fear." Such feelings may carry localized somatic sensations such as chills or a sinking feeling in the stomach.[6] A dubious theory holds that such feelings alone constitute an emotion, that different felt qualities distinguish different emotions, and that we intuitively and infallibly recognize these feelings by introspection. This is implausible since our emotions are often "mixed" or complex and it takes a good deal of reflection to sort them out; indeed, misjudging our feelings is a live possibility. In addition, the difference between emotions—between spite and resentment, say—seems to lie not in the feelings proper but in their appraisals or in other components.

3. There occur *changes in involuntary bodily processes and overt reactions,* such as an increase in strength produced by a flush of adrenalin, paling, gooseflesh, drying of the throat, etc. The James-Lange theory reduces emotions to these physiological alterations—and contemporary behaviorists are likely to concur.[7] The primary mistake of this reductionism is that it discards the most significant fact about these physical reactions: they result from and are shaped by appraisals. An injection of certain drugs might replicate the symptoms displayed by the man in our example, yet would we say he was frightened? As Peters has argued, this misguided reductionism causes psychologists to restrict their studies to emotions like anger and fear which have clear and distinct physiological expressions (even in animals) and to ignore emotions like remorse and embarrassment which carry fewer specific overt reactions and presuppose a moral framework.[8]

4. An emotional person has *tendencies to act* in certain ways—to run in fear, to strike out in anger—which may or may not issue in action. "Tendency" is as useful a term as it is problematic. Perhaps it is best understood here as a generalized response pattern, implanted genetically or culturally, which will appear unless rejected or controlled by the agent or prevented by the agent's physical condition or surroundings. We may affirm a man's tendency to flee in fear though he walks calmly to avoid panicking others, though he is drugged and unable to run, though he is locked in his car.

5. Finally, there is a *focusing of consciousness on the object of appraisal* and a concomitant inability to attend to other matters. The fearful man is fixed on the tornado and is unable to concentrate and perform mundane work. Alston characterizes this as "an upset or disturbed condition of mind or body"[9]; Epicurus calls it a "storm in the soul." But these terms are too negative to des-

cribe the mental condition of effervescent joy, profound awe, or simple gratitude.

An emotion is best understood as a structured complex of these five components; it is not, I believe, reducible to one of them. To be angry or joyful or indignant is to make a value judgment which is manifested as a characteristic feeling accompanied by bodily changes, tendencies toward certain actions, and a focusing of consciousness on the evaluative object. The significance of the evaluation to the agent will directly affect the intensity of the other four components.[10]

This interpretation is quite opposed to the conventional view of the emotions as passively received feelings. It is similar to that of Hepburn, who writes that "having an emotion is an active affair, since it involves selective attention, the grouping or interpreting of perceived features of one's situation, and the making of judgments of value."[11] I am unsure of the relation of my position to that of Peters, since I find his account unclear or inconsistent. On the one hand Peters affirms that "different appraisals are largely constitutive of different emotions" and that "emotions are basically forms of cognitions"; yet on the other hand he speaks of "the connexion *between* emotions and distinctive appraisals" and calls an emotion "a passivity" *resulting from* an appraisal (in contrast to motives which may stem from the same appraisal but are linked to action).[12] On balance I believe Peters regards the emotions as consequent to certain judgments, like trailers that are somehow hitched to peculiarly self-involved evaluations, having no remarkable purpose or value. His implicit message is that for better or worse we are saddled with our emotions and should try to make the best of it.

EDUCATING THE EMOTIONS

I now turn to the possibility of educating the emotions, giving *en passant* further discussion of their nature and function. In this section, I shall explore four conceptions of emotive education, presenting each one sympathetically then critically, with application of the foregoing discussion.

1. An emotional person is immature, maladjusted, and often irrational. Such a person is at odds with the world and hampers his self-actualization and his effectiveness in relating to others. To educate the emotions, according to one view, might mean then to learn to suppress them. The central ideal of this interpretation is self-control; its attendant virtues are dignity, autonomy, and gracious acceptance of the inevitable. In educating the emotions, one may learn to curb one's tendencies to act (such as facing up to danger instead of fleeing, or maintaining a well-modulated voice rather than yelling in anger), to improve one's ability to concentrate in emotional situations, and even to reduce the "involuntary" bodily reactions through biofeedback techniques. Most advocates of this form of emotive education want us to go beyond displaying the

outward signs of composure; they want us to cleanse ourselves of the passionate feelings that corrode our consciousness. This is the position of Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus, who tells us that when we sympathize with a grieving friend we must "Take heed, however, not to groan inwardly, too."[13] The Stoic slave has an ingenious prescription: since emotions are to be avoided, we should, when necessary, alter our appraisals accordingly. "We are not disturbed by things, but by the view we take of things."[14]

The first problem with this interpretation is its distorted use of the term "education." It is incorrect or ironic to say that we are educating something when in fact we are trying to control, suppress, or eliminate that thing. Would we not expect a genuine education of the emotions to involve "transforming and civilizing emotions, rendering them more discriminating, appropriate, reasonable, sensitive"?[15] Clearly this first problem stems from a more basic one: those who subscribe to this position think of the passions in that negative and passive way I earlier rejected. If our education amputates or atrophies the emotions, it bifurcates the person and distorts our common experience.

There is a modified version of this position that does not share this abhorrence of the passions yet retains the aims of self-control, dignity, and autonomy. This version holds that the education of the emotions entails not suppressing them but channeling them into creative and constructive actions. Rather than simply burn with anger, stew in resentment, or wither with grief, the emotionally educated person will produce an aesthetic object, strive for social reform, or otherwise act in a constructive manner suggested by the original appraisal. Thus sublimated, emotions yield motives for positive action. This is a commendable, if limited, aim for affective education.[16]

2. A second possibility is that to educate one's emotions is to become more adept at sorting out and identifying one's feelings, the appraisals they manifest, and their true objects. This is an art that ranges from simple introspection to sustained psychoanalysis. It often requires effort and keen insight, for our feelings are not easily read—even by ourselves. We think we feel hatred, when we really feel fear. We believe we are angry at *A*, when in fact we are angry at *B*. We feel anxious and cannot name the cause. The operative ideal of this interpretation is self-knowledge; its attendant virtues are honesty, self-respect, and integrity. When we analyze our passions we search ourselves to encounter our true values and sources of self-esteem. Surely to become more sensitive to and insightful about one's emotions is an educational aim of importance. However, this interpretation does not foresee a development of the emotions so much as a development of the intellect and the reflective skills. The educational focus is not actually on the passions; they remain pretty much as they were. The real growth is in our introspective ability.

For some, though, this self-knowledge is desirable because it promotes self-control. If we once understand our emotions, they will no longer have the power to "overcome" us. Spinoza adopts this "know your enemy" stance when

he states: "In proportion, then, as we know an emotion better is it more within our control, and the less does the mind suffer from it."[17] It is at this therapeutic point that the aims of philosophy and psychoanalysis converge. The difficulty here is the by now familiar misconception of the nature of emotion as a diminishment of human dignity.

3. Another interpretation is that an emotionally educated person has only justifiable emotional states. To educate the emotions is to increase the justifiability of one's emotions—in effect, to rationalize one's passions. This will seem a strange notion if we hold the conventional view of the emotions, but the strangeness vanishes when we realize that the emotions are largely constituted of value judgments. When one is indignant or embarrassed one has cognitions of an evaluative kind, and such value judgments may be justified by submission to relevant criteria. In ordinary discourse we use such phrases as "rightfully indignant" and "overly embarrassed," for example, which imply justifiability.

Analysis reveals there are several elements of an emotion which may be justified. First, there is the appraisal itself, which should be valid and sound. suppose I feel regret for an action I believe I committed but which in fact never occurred. My emotion is *invalid,* hence unjustified. Perhaps I am afraid of certain spiders which are really harmless. My fear is unjustified because its appraisal is *unsound;* my belief that the spiders pose a threat is mistaken. The phrase "rightfully indignant" implies that the constitutive judgment of indignation is both valid and sound.

Second, the intensity and duration of the emotion as exhibited in the feelings, bodily reactions, tendencies to act, and focusing of consciousness may be justified. Proper intensity and duration seem to be a function of the values involved in the appraisal, of the subjective implications of the appraisal, and of certain situational and cultural factors. Just how embarrassed I should be at a *faux pas* varies with the cultural and situational context, the perceived seriousness of my lapse, and the importance I ascribe to the onlookers. Clearly I can overstep the bounds and become "overly embarrassed." At this point my embarrassment is unjustified.[18]

A dictionary will confirm that "contemptible" means "worthy of contempt." When an act is contemptible, it should therefore call forth in us the emotion of contempt, to an appropriate level of emotional intensity and duration. Similarly, that which is enviable, respectable, pitiable, estimable, or venerable should produce envy, respect, pity, esteem, or veneration, respectively, in a rational agent. So embedded in our view of rationality is the justifiability of emotion that it is seen as an indication of insanity to have severe violations of the proper ranges of emotional intensity and duration, and to have abnormal emotive appraisals.

A third factor requiring justification is the form of overt expression given to an emotion. Here the criteria are appropriateness and sincerity. My expression of hatred may be unjustified if indeed I sincerely feel envy. And laughter,

for instance, is appropriate to some emotions but not others; if it occurs in a situation in which one would expect grief, despair, or awe, one may seek a justification.

To educate the emotions is, in sum, to rationalize them, subjecting one's appraisals and reactions to relevant criteria and thereby emoting in an orderly and proper manner. The operative ideal of this interpretation is reason; it brings with it the predictability of human behavior, the set of common expectations that makes social relations possible. It is a sound and interesting view, and places emotive education within the larger context of values education and training in deliberation.

4. There is yet another conception of the education of the emotions. We might hope to transform our emotions—not during a given emotional state since they go by rather quickly, but over a span of time—by increasing the sensitivity, freshness, scope, and complexity of our emotions. Just as cognitions of other kinds may be crude and undiscriminating, trite and unimaginative, numbed and rigidly automatic, so may be our emotions. Continuous exposure to the violence and inhumanity of a prison may numb the anger that one should and otherwise would feel. The "canned laughter" used on television shows may contribute to a deadened state of "feeling the way we're supposed to." Anger may sometimes be a crude response to a person's behavior when pity or compassion are more insightful reactions. An aim of affective education, then, would be to reverse the ossification of our emotional system and to develop the range and character of its responses.

This conception is probably more faithful to the idea of education than any of the previous three, for education involves the understanding of alternative possibilities for thought and action along with the skills to evaluate these alternatives.[19] This is precisely what is being proposed for the passions: a growth in one's ability to imagine and express alternative ways of feeling that are fresh and illuminating, and that reveal understanding.

Traditionally the arts have been touted as offering this kind of emotive education. Literature, poetry, and drama, especially, present varied and creative responses to life-situations, with which we can empathize and from which we can learn novel yet appropriate feelings. As with education in other domains, the awareness of alternatives provides a kind of freedom, a liberation from mindless routines and cliches through the capability of imagining and selecting alternatives.

This educational use of the arts is discussed by Hepburn, who says:

> In a sense--in a weak sense--some of these alternatives were open to us before ever we encountered the works of art in which they are set forth; but they are unlikely to become *live* options; our freedom will not become an *effective* freedom until we have a concrete image and a vivid realization of the options: and this art can supply.[20]

Hepburn finds only one worrisome problem in this proposal. We must heed Oscar Wilde's dictum: Life imitates Art. Because of the imaginative power of the arts there is the danger that we will come to draw our emotions second-hand from the arts, or even that we will become absorbed into the world of a single author or school. If we adopt an ideology of the emotions from the absurdists, or the angry artists, or the prophets of doom, we have only vicarious feelings and borrowed judgments. A broad and diversified contact with the arts seems the obvious preventive measure.

THE STATUS OF THE EMOTIONS

We have now surveyed four conceptions of emotive education: (1) the suppression, or better, the sublimation of the emotions; (2) the development of our introspective ability, enabling us better to identify our emotions and their objects; (3) the rationalization of our passions by increasing the proportion of our emotional states that are justified; and (4) the transformation of our emotions, rendering them more vibrant, sensitive, and imaginative. If the first of these is understood as sublimation rather than suppression, all four conceptions are compatible and, in my judgment, all are necessary to form a comprehensive approach to the education of the emotions.

Moreover, a view of the emotions has emerged that is very different from the conventional picture described at the outset. Emotions are primarily cognitions. Their defining feature is an evaluation, and it is the nature of that evaluation that distinguishes one emotion from another. Emotions are justifiable, unlike toothaches and amnesia and waves of nausea and other things that "come over" us. Emotions are, therefore, subject to rational criteria. They may involve considerable conceptual complexity (think of such passions as remorse, indignation, or nostalgia); they function according to rules yet respond to novel circumstances; they can develop from the trite and rough to the imaginative and discriminating. In all this the "affections" seem eminently cognitive, rational, and educable.

This is not to say that we should exult in violent emotion. Nor is it to claim that our passions will never undermine our efforts to be rational. A person with powerful and uneducated emotions is a miserable, unpleasant, and potentially dangerous person. Nevertheless, our subtle and rich emotional capacities are not a curse, an embarrassment, or an indignity. Indeed, it seems our emotions serve important purposes: they signal our consciousness that a self-involved evaluation has been accomplished; they can spur us to action as they yield instinctive reactions and motives; they enhance and reflect moral education; they offer self-knowledge which can be profound; they structure our personal, perspectival worlds—the world as reconstructed by our personal values, biographies, and anticipations. They are, as Solomon has claimed,

> *constitutional* judgments. They do not just *find* interpretations and evaluations of our world...They constitute them. They do not merely *apply* standards of interpretation and evaluation to our experience but in an important sense *supply* them.[21]

And the educated emotions thus represent an extension of human activity into the various possibilities of the world for us, as it takes on different colors and meanings under our imaginative transformations.

Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Rollins College Philosophy-Religion Club in December, 1977, and to the Southeast Philosophy of Education Society in February, 1978.

1. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, Parts IV and V. The definition occurs in Part V, Proposition III. Spinoza distinguishes passions and emotions—the former being a special case of the latter—but this does not alter my treatment of his views.

2. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book VIII, paragraph 5 and Book V, paragraph 26. However, he also adds: "But when the emotions rise to the mind by virtue of the sympathy that naturally exists in a body which is all one, then you must not strive to resist the feeling, for it is natural." Nevertheless, both Marcus Aurelius and Spinoza so truncate our emotional experience—reducing it to serenity or blessed joy alone—that my characterization is justified.

3. Israel Scheffler, "In Praise of the Cognitive Emotions," *Teachers College Record* 79, 2 (December 1977); pp. 171-186.

4. For a sustained treatment of this point, see Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1976), esp. p. xvii.

5. William P. Alston, "Emotion and Feeling," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (Cambridge, Mass.: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 479-486. This article contains a succinct dialectical presentation of the major theories of the emotions. I have drawn on Alston's analysis in this section but have reordered his list of features considerably.

6. Alston, op. cit., distinguishes between feelings and bodily sensations, then defines the latter as localized feelings. I have dropped the distinction.

7. William James and C. G. Lange, *The Emotions* (Baltimore: 1922).

8. R. S. Peters, "The Education of the Emotions," in *Education and Reason* (Part III of *Education and the Development of Reason)*, ed. R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst, and R. S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 76-78.

9. Alston, op. cit., pp. 480-482.

10. See Solomon, op. cit., for a presentation of the position that "self-esteem is the ultimate goal of every passion" (p. 96).

11. R. W. Hepburn, "The Arts and the Education of Feeling and Emotion," in *Education and Reason*, ed. Dearden, Hirst, and Peters, p. 95.

12. R. S. Peters, "The Education of the Emotions," in *Education and Reason*, ed. Dearden, Hirst, and Peters, pp. 77, 79. The italics are mine.

13. Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, paragraph v.

14. Ibid., paragraph xvi.

15. Hepburn, op. cit., p. 94.

16. Peters (op. cit., p. 79ff.) describes this channeling of emotions into constructive action as the changing of an emotion, which is a "passivity," into a motive, which is connected to action. Motives and emotions are, for him, related only indirectly through the appraisal that generates them. This conception provides further evidence for the earlier conclusions that Peters excludes the appraisal from the emotion proper.

17. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part V. corollary to Prop. III.

18. The Greeks incorporated this ideal of appropriate emotional intensity and duration into the concept of *sophrosyne* ("moderation"). It is Achilles whose heroic wrath exceeds these bounds in the *Iliad* and who is chastised for unjustified and excessive emotion—a form of *hybris*.

19. For a development of this conception see D. R. DeNicola, "The Philosopher, The Teacher, and the Quest for Clarity," in *Philosophical Reflections on Education and Society*, ed. Don Chipman and Creighton Peden (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978) pp. 267-281.

20. Hepburn, op. cit., p. 98.

21. Solomon, op. cit., p. 194, italics in the original.