

Philosophy 6200 Problems in Contemporary Philosophy

Philosophy of the Emotions

University of Guelph

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Course website: www.biophilosophy.ca (follow the link)

Topic: Transcending the nature/nurture dichotomy in the study of emotion.

Description

Emotions structure most social relations. For example, we learn to feel guilty in response to certain culturally defined conditions. The nature of this unpleasant experience, and its behavioural expression, are likewise conditioned by “emotion scripts” as psychologist Keith Oatley calls them. Even when we are not experiencing a particular emotion like guilt, we are aware of conditions that would trigger it and, often, we are attempting to invoke this emotion in others. Emotions from this perspective are the culturally constructed basis for most social transactions.

On the other hand, there is long tradition that views emotions as an expression of our “animal natures.” From this perspective, emotions are constrained by biology and they operate independent of, often in opposition to, practical judgment. Proto- guilt, for example, is thought to have originated in pair-bonding primates as what Robert Frank calls a “commitment securing device.” Later, this mechanism was co-opted in social evolution to help enforce cooperation. These Darwinian approaches claim to identify the adaptive problems that emotions are genetically “programmed” to solve.

Both views are reductionistic. The first attempts to view emotion purely as a cultural phenomenon and the second as a biological one. This course will investigate attempts to transcend this nature/nurture dichotomy. The two central questions of the course are (1) How can emotions be viewed simultaneously as biological and as cultural phenomena? and (2) What, if any, are the explanatory benefits of a hybrid view?

The first section of the course will briefly review four influential historical theories of emotion (Descartes, Hume, James, and Darwin). We then move to contemporary developments and reactions to these positions. In particular, we will consider Antonio Damasio’s claim that emotions guide reason, Paul Griffiths’ claim that “higher cognitive” emotions are a distinct in kind from “affect programs”, and Jesse Prinz’s neo-Jamesian view. We will also investigate phenomenological theories of emotion, some cultural evolutionary accounts, and a little bit of recent social neuroscience.

Assessment

Students will write short weekly reflections (2-3 pages) on one of the readings from that week. These account for 30% of the grade. The main writing assignment will involve a collaborative review paper that we write as a group and submit to a journal at the end of semester. Each student will contribute one section to this paper (approximately 2000 words – carefully written and researched). This accounts for 40% of the grade. The final 30% is based on participation in seminar.

Part 1: Four philosophers of emotion

Jan 15 Descartes' Passions

Excerpts from *Passions of the Soul*.

Schmitter, A.M. (2007) "How to Engineer a Human Being: Passions and Functional Explanation in Descartes" in *A Companion to Descartes*, ed. J. Broughton, and J. Carriero, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 426-44.

Brassfield, S. . (2012) Never Let the Passions Be Your Guide: Descartes and the Role of the Passions. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2012, Vol.20(3), p.459-477.

Jan 22 Hume' sentimentalism

Davidson, D. (1976) Hume's Cognitive Theory of Pride. *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 744-757.

Rorty, A. O., 1982, "From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments," *Philosophy*, 57: 159-72.

Jan 29 James' somatic theory of emotion

Excerpt from *Principles of Psychology*.

Bruce H. Friedman (2010) Feelings and the body: The Jamesian perspective on autonomic specificity of emotion. *Biological Psychology* 84(3) 383-393.

Barrett, L.F. Ochsner, K.N. & Gross, J.J. (2007), On the automaticity of emotion. In J.A. Bargh (ed.) *Social Psychology and the Unconscious: The Automaticity of Higher Mental Processes*. Psychology Press: New York.

Robert Solomon, "Getting Angry: The Jamesian theory of Emotion in Anthropology", (76-91).

Feb 5 Darwin's evolutionary account of social emotions

Excerpt from *Descent of Man* (Chapters 3 & 5).

Richards, R. Darwin on Mind, Morals and emotion.

<http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/files/richards/Cambridge+Darwin+on+Mind.pdf>.

Built For Speed, Not For Comfort: Darwinian Theory and Human Culture

Richerson, Peter J; Boyd, Robert **History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences** 23.3-4 (2001): 425-465.

Part 2: The opposition between biological and constructionist accounts of emotion.

Feb 12 Contemporary somatic theories of emotion

Damasio, A. R. (1996) 'The somatic marker hypothesis and the possible functions of the prefrontal cortex', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, **351**, 1413-20.

Prinz, J. (2006) Is emotion a form of perception? *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 36 (supp). 137-160. <http://www.sfu.ca/~kathleea/docs/36.5Sprinz.pdf>

Linguist, S. & Bartol, J. (2013). Two myths about somatic markers. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 64(3): 455-484.

Feb 26 The opposition between affect programs, cognitivism and constructivism
Excerpts from Paul Griffiths' *What Emotions Really Are*.

March 5 Social constructionism

Solomon, R. (1977) *The Logic of Emotion*. *Nous* 11(1) 41-49.

Carl Ratner, (1989) "A Social Constructionist Critique of Naturalistic Theories of Emotion",
Journal of Mind and Behavior 10: 211-230

Hannelore Weber, (2004) "Explorations in the Social Construction of Anger", *Motivation and Emotion* 28(2): 197-219

Part 3: Attempts to transcend the nature/nurture dichotomy

March 12: Cultural evolution

R. Frank: *Cooperation through emotional commitment* (reference TBA)

Linguist, S. (2007) "Prospects for a dual inheritance model of emotional evolution." *Philosophy of Science*, 74: 848–859. March 26: Phenomenology of emotion

March 19: Affective Neuroscience

Griffiths (200?) *Emotion is still not a natural kind*.

<http://www.philosophy.dept.shef.ac.uk/AHRB-Project/Papers/GriffithsPaper.pdf>

Charland, L. *The heat of emotion: Valence and the demarcation problem*.

<http://publish.uwo.ca/~charland/publications/documents/heatofemotion.pdf>

Columbetti, G. (2005) *Appraising valence*, *JOURNAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES*, vol. 12, no. 8-10, 2005, 103-126.

March 26: Phenomenology

Solomon, R. (2010) *Emotions in phenomenology and existentialism*. In H. Dreyfus and M. A. Wrathall (eds) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*. Wiley.

Columbetti, G (2013) *Some Ideas for the Integration of Neurophenomenology and Affective Neuroscience*, *Constructivist Foundations*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2013, 288-297

Ratcliffe, M. 2010. *Phenomenology and Neurobiology of moods and emotions*. In Gallagher & Schmicking (eds.) *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*. Springer: New York.

April 2: Transactionalism

Paul Griffiths and Andreas Scaratino (2005) *Emotions in the wild: The situated perspective on emotion*", in *Cambridge Handbook Of Situated Cognition*, Robbins, P and Aydede, (Eds) (1-28).

More - TBA