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INTELLECTUAL EMOTIONS AND RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

Peter Goldie

What is the best model of emotion if we are to reach a good understanding of the role of emotion in religious life? I begin by setting out a simple model of emotion, based on a paradigm emotional experience of fear of an immediate threat in one's environment. I argue that the simple model neglects many of the complexities of our emotional lives, including in particular the complexities that one finds with the intellectual emotions. I then discuss how our dispositions to have these kinds of emotions, which are part of what it is to be a virtuous intellectual enquirer, are subject to vicissitudes, in particular brought about by depression, apathy and other damaging changes to our psychic economy. These changes can flatten affect, so that one's intellectual life goes cold on one. Finally, I commend the idea of applying this model of intellectual emotion onto religious emotion.

A Simple Model of Emotion

There is a model of emotion to be found in the current debate on the emotions, both in philosophy and in the interdisciplinary activity of cognitive science, in which philosophy plays its part. According to this model, the emotions are quite simple phenomena. In support of the model, we are often given an example—a paradigm. Here is one such. We see a bear approaching us in the woods, and we react with fear. This fearful reaction involves certain visceral changes and changes to the autonomic nervous system (in this case increased heart rate, increased adrenalin flow and so on), which changes are felt. This is just what emotional feelings are—*bodily* feelings. The fearful reaction also involves certain action tendencies (in this case the tendency to escape from the threat, by running or hiding perhaps).¹ Something like this model is often attributed to the work of William James, and there certainly is some truth in the idea. According to James, emotions—or to be precise what he called the 'standard emotions'—are just the feeling of certain bodily changes which "follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact"; "our feelings of the changes

¹For discussion of action tendencies, see Nico J. Fridja, *The Laws of Emotion* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass., 2007).



as they occur *is* the emotion."² Anyway, perhaps we can safely call the model *Jamesian*, bearing in mind that it continues to be advocated today in one form or another by people who call their accounts Jamesian.³

On this simple—Jamesian—model, the emotions have certain important characteristics. First, they are short-term reactions to events in our immediate environment, or to what is sometimes called an ‘eliciting event’—the approaching bear in this case.⁴ Secondly, these reactions are selectionally advantageous to us; they are adaptive.⁵ On our example, the fearful responses to the approaching bear, including the bodily changes and action tendencies, increase our chances of survival and thus of being able to pass on our genes, always on the assumption that the environment in which we now live shares relevant properties with the environment in which the emotions evolved—the so-called environment of evolutionary adaptedness. Thirdly, the emotions on this model are universal, or at least pan-cultural amongst humans, with pan-cultural facial expression, and are shared with, or homologous to, emotions in other animals.⁶ Fourthly, the emotions do not need to involve reasoning through higher-level cognitive processes; indeed, the very immediacy of the response to the bear is evidence for this, and for the fact that the immediate non-cognitive response is more adaptive than slower cognitive processing; it is what is called fast and frugal or quick and dirty.⁷ And fifthly, because the emotions on this model are quite simple phenomena, involving measurable bodily changes, they are operationalisable: one can conduct empirical studies in psychology, biology and neuroscience to throw light on what processes are involved.

I am sympathetic to much in this model of emotion. But my sympathy comes with two very substantial qualifications. The first qualification is

²William James, “What is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9 (1884): 188–205, at 189–190.

³See, for example, Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994); Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴For this kind of view, see Klaus Scherer, “Emotions in Everyday Life,” *Social Science Information* 43 (2004): 499–570.

⁵For this kind of view, see John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “The Evolutionary Psychology of the Emotions and their Relationship to Internal Regulatory Variables,” in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. M. Lewis, J. Haviland-Jones, and L. Feldman Barrett (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 114–137.

⁶For this kind of view, see Paul Ekman, “An Argument for Basic Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion* 6 (1992): 169–200; Paul Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, with an introduction, afterword and commentary by P. Ekman (London: HarperCollins, 1998). Joseph LeDoux discusses how the amygdala is implicated in fear responses in rats and humans in his *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁷Many scholars are particularly struck by the experiments of Robert Zajonc, which purport to show that affect can occur prior to, and without, cognition. See his “On the Primacy of Affect,” *American Psychologist* 39 (1984): 117–123, and “Evidence for Non-Conscious Emotions,” in *The Nature of Emotions*, ed. P. Ekman and R. Davidson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 293–297.

that the model must not claim hegemony; it must not claim that emotions in general have all these features. For if it does, it skews the class of emotion towards this particular paradigm. Some emotional experiences, including fear of the approaching bear, no doubt do have these features. But to insist that all emotions have these features either denies the phenomena, or it redefines emotion in a way that eliminates the rest of our emotional life by what is more or less a definitional fiat, in effect insisting that what lacks the features outlined above isn't *really* an emotion.⁸

The second qualification is really more of a disagreement. I would contend, although I cannot argue for it here, that not all emotional feelings are bodily feelings. Feelings can also be directed towards things in the world beyond the bounds of the body — towards the bear for example; these feelings, bound up with thought, are what I have called *feelings towards*.⁹

What the Simple Model Neglects

There is much more to our emotional life than is captured by the simple Jamesian model, and there is today a considerable reaction against it.¹⁰ Here I want to briefly to discuss three aspects of emotion that the simple model neglects, focussing in particular on the second and third. With these three aspects in place we have, I suggest, a more complex model of emotion, one that is better placed to capture the role of emotion in religious life — better, that is, than the simple model that takes as its paradigm our reaction to the approaching bear in the woods.

(i) The life of the Mind

First, then, we humans are capable of having emotions that are directed in thought and feeling towards the past and future. We can, for example, feel shame at the silly and irresponsible thing we did at that party on the beach all those years ago. This shame that we now feel might not be what we felt at the time; perhaps then, being younger, we thought our behaviour to be rather insouciant and stylish, and only now do we see it as it really

⁸See Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are*.

⁹This is of course not to deny that bodily feelings are a significant aspect of emotional experience; what is being denied is that bodily feelings are the *only* feelings which are involved. For discussion, see my *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), and "Getting Feelings into Emotional Experience in the Right Way," *Emotion Review* 1 (2009), special edition on emotional experience, ed. S. Döring and R. Reisenzein, 232–239.

¹⁰See, for example, Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press); John Deigh, "Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions," *Ethics* 104 (1994): 824–854; Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert Roberts, *Emotions: An Aid in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert Solomon, *The Passions* (New York: Doubleday, 1976); Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Bennett Helm, *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and my *The Emotions*. There is not space here to argue for the alternative model of emotion that I am putting forward in this paper; the aim, rather, is to begin with the assumption that this model is more or less correct, and then to see how it might be applied to the religious emotions.

was. And in respect of the future, emotions can be involved in our forming intentions and in making plans. We can, for example, consider doing something rather reprehensible and feel guilty at the very thought: we shrink from the action ‘as an impossibility,’ to use J. S. Mill’s nice expression.¹¹ So in us humans our emotions are not just concerned with ‘eliciting events’ in our immediate environment, but with what I like to call the life of the mind.¹² Moreover, we can be reflective about our emotions, assessing them as appropriate or inappropriate, and even having emotions about the emotions which we have or imagine having.

(ii) *The Intellectual (and Aesthetic) Emotions*

The second aspect of human emotion that the simple model neglects is that emotions can be directed in thought and feelings towards matters of intellectual or aesthetic import, where the characteristic features of the simple model are much less readily applicable. I will not be discussing the aesthetic emotions here,¹³ but will focus on the intellectual emotions, although I might quickly note that in the neglect of both these kinds of emotion we might again see a trace of William James, who thought of intellectual, aesthetic and ethical emotions as other than what he called ‘standard.’¹⁴

A number of philosophers have recently argued persuasively for the existence of intellectual emotions.¹⁵ These include emotions such as delight, wonder, awe, fascination, courage, surprise, worry, doubt, curiosity, concern, tenacity, and hope, some of which are found elsewhere, other than when directed towards intellectual objects, and some of which are more exclusive to intellectual matters. As Michael Stocker in particular has argued, these emotions have an eminent history in philosophical writing, which makes it even more notable that they are neglected today, and even more notable that one needs to argue for their existence. Moreover, they have an eminent history in biographies and autobiographies of philosophical and scientific enquiry, where we often find accounts that refer specifically to the emotions experienced by the philosopher or the scientist. The psychologist Theodule Ribot, who was writing just after William James, remarked, “The biographies of learned men furnish us with innumerable examples: the perpetual physical sufferings

¹¹John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. R. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 3.

¹²See my “The Life of the Mind: Commentary on ‘Emotions in Everyday Life,’” *Social Science Information* 43 (2004): 591–598.

¹³For discussion, see my “Towards a Virtue Theory of Art,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47 (2007): 372–387, and “Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supp. Vol.* LXXXII (2008): 179–195.

¹⁴For a very helpful discussion, see Michael Stocker, “Intellectual and Other Non-Standard Emotions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. P. Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 401–423.

¹⁵See in particular Stocker, “Intellectual and Other Non-Standard Emotions”; and Adam Morton, “Epistemic Emotions,” in P. Goldie, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, 385–399.

of Pascal, Malebranche nearly suffocated by the palpitations of his heart when reading Descartes, Humphrey Davy dancing in his laboratory after having made the discovery of potassium," and so on.¹⁶ Many such examples, including Davy's discovery of potassium, are discussed in Richard Holmes's very nice book *The Age of Wonder* (2009). Holmes mentions there that Coleridge said that science was "necessarily performed with *the passion of hope*"¹⁷—a thought with which his friend Davy was very much in agreement. A nice example is Isaac Newton, who, in his letter to the then Secretary of the Royal Society, reports his first response to seeing light shone through a prism: "It was at first a pleasing divertissement to view the vivid and intense colours produced thereby, but after a while applying myself to consider them more circumspectly, I became surprised to see them in an oblong form; which, according to the received laws of refraction, I expected should have been circular. . . . Comparing the length of this coloured spectrum with its breadth, I found it about five times greater, a disproportion so extravagant that it excited me to a more than ordinary curiosity of examining from whence it might proceed."¹⁸ In this short paragraph, we can count at least four intellectual emotions.

One thought about the intellectual emotions is that their value is merely as a non-necessary instrumental aid to intellectual enquiry which an enquirer could manage perfectly well without, although they might be epistemically helpful. Although I can't argue for it here, I prefer the idea that we should think of what it is to have the intellectual virtues (I intend no elitist connotations here in the term 'intellectual') as being analogous to what it is, according to Aristotle, to be an ethically virtuous person.¹⁹ According to this idea, the virtuous intellectual enquirer, like his ethical counterpart, will have, as Aristotle put it, the right emotions at the right time in the right place and towards the right kinds of object,²⁰ and being able to do this is part of what it is to be virtuous. In other words, doing the right things is not sufficient for intellectual virtue; without the appropriate intellectual emotions, we cannot be a fully virtuous enquirer, and emotion is a necessary component of intellectual activity. On this view, then, in scientific or philosophical enquiry—what one might think of as the paradigm of rational activity—emotion is not just an instrumental aid, but essential to the activity itself. And, I believe, just the same is true of the

¹⁶For this citation from Theodore Ribot, see Michael Stocker, "Intellectual and Other Non-Standard Emotions," 411. See also Ribot's *Psychology of the Emotions* (New York: Scribner's, 1897).

¹⁷Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: Pantheon Books, 2009), 268.

¹⁸Cited in Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 303.

¹⁹For a recent survey in this area, see Guy Axtell, "Recent Work on Virtue Epistemology," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997:), 1–26.

²⁰Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 1099a16–20.

artistic virtues: having the right emotions is essential here too. Furthermore, given that ethical, intellectual and aesthetic emotions aren't just an added extra but essential to their related activities, and given that engaging in these virtuous activities is constitutive of well-being, it follows that one cannot live a good life, a life of virtue, without these emotions.²¹

Virtues are, of course, a kind of disposition, and therefore, I am suggesting, the ethical, intellectual and aesthetic virtues will include dispositions to have the right emotions. And this leads me neatly to the third aspect of human emotion that the simple model neglects: emotional dispositions.

(iii) *Emotional Dispositions*

In discussing this third neglected aspect of emotion, I want to begin by recalling an ambiguity in our way of talking of emotion. If I say that I am envious of Mary's successes, I might be referring to the occurrent emotion, to the feeling of envy that I am now experiencing. Or alternatively I might be referring to the emotion as a dispositional attitude, an attitude that I have towards Mary's successes. On this latter alternative, then, it can truthfully be said of me that I am envious of Mary's successes without in any way implying that I am at this moment feeling envious; I might be asleep or thinking of something entirely different.²²

We typically use the term 'emotion' for both episode and disposition, but the simple view focuses only on the episode. And yet our emotional dispositions are an integral part of our psychic economy. They make us what we are: our love of our children and parents; your hatred of oppression; his fear of large dogs; her sympathy for the homeless.

It is an important feature of emotional dispositions that they are not simply dispositions to have a single kind of emotion. For example, your enduring love of your children or parents is not just a disposition to have loving feelings towards them when they are in the offing. It can be expressed in a complex structure of possible responses: delight if they succeed in their endeavours; anger if you hear them insulted behind their backs; fear and concern if you think they might be ill; hope if you think that their illness might have a cure; and so on.²³ Even my envy of Mary's successes isn't just a disposition to feel *envy*; it can be expressed in a feeling of delight when I hear that her latest success looks after all as if it's turning into something of a poisoned chalice; I wouldn't be feeling this delight if I weren't envious of her.

²¹According to Aristotle, artistic activity (both in producing and in appreciating art) is not part of well-being or *eudaimonia*; intellectual activity, of course, is; see especially *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X. For discussion, with reason for disagreeing with Aristotle about the place of artistic activity in well-being, see my "Towards a Virtue Theory of Art" and "Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being."

²²Emotions as dispositions are central to Richard Wollheim's account of emotion; see his *On the Emotions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), and for discussion see my "Wollheim on Emotion and Imagination," *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 1–17.

²³This kind of structure is at the heart of Bennett Helm's account in his *Emotional Reason*.

Another important feature of emotional dispositions is their changeability—their vicissitudes. Part of this is to be explained by the ways in which emotional dispositions interact with experience: an experience can change the disposition—by consolidating it, or by attenuating it, or in other ways.²⁴ For example, one's sympathy for the homeless might be permanently damaged or even disabled completely as a result of a single experience of being attacked by a homeless person. Emotional dispositions can also be changed as a result of changes in other dispositions elsewhere in one's psychic economy. For example, her disposition to delight in the natural beauties of open spaces might disappear altogether as a result of an agoraphobia that only arrived as she reached middle age.

There are other possibilities here, however, possibilities that give rise to significant epistemic questions in understanding the mind—both one's own mind and the mind of others. For it is possible that certain factors can have the effect of blocking off or preventing the response that one would otherwise expect from the disposition, whilst the disposition remains in place.²⁵ For example, if I am depressed, as a loving father I might not feel the delight that I otherwise would when I hear of the success of my son in his exams, although I really am still a loving father. If I am overwhelmed with troubles of my own, as a fervent campaigner for civil rights I might not feel the compassion that I normally would when I hear of the arrest of a prisoner of conscience somewhere in the world. In these cases I might *judge* that these events are a good or a bad thing, and much to be celebrated or bemoaned, but still, I don't *feel* as I should, or as I used to feel. The expression of the emotional dispositions is blocked, and the judgements are no longer emotionally laden as they were.

Earlier I said that, in emotional experience, thought and feeling are bound up together, directed together towards the object of the emotion. As a corollary to that, I would add that we should resist the idea that these judgements are just the same with or without the feeling, so that if the feeling later returns, it is simply to be added on to the content of the judgement. This is what I call the add-on view; against this, I prefer the view that, with feeling bound up into thought, both the content of the judgement and the attitude itself are different.²⁶

But the epistemic questions should be clear. In each case we might not know whether the disposition has ceased to exist, or whether the disposition is temporarily blocked from its normal expression. Would she still delight in open spaces if her agoraphobia could be cured? Am I no longer

²⁴For detailed discussion, see Wollheim, *On the Emotions*.

²⁵These issues are discussed in Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "Demystifying Sensibilities: Sentimental Values and the Instability of Affect," in P. Goldie, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, 585–613.

²⁶For discussion, see my *The Emotions*, and my "Getting Feelings into Emotional Experience in the Right Way." See also Tim Blosler, "The Content of Emotional Thoughts," *Philosophical Papers* 36 (2007): 219–243; and Michelle Montague, "The Logic, Intentionality, and Phenomenology of Emotion," *Philosophical Studies* 145 (2009): 171–192.

a loving father, or am I a loving father who is depressed? Is it just temporary compassion fatigue or don't I really care about political freedom any more?

Intellectual Emotion, Virtue, and Varieties of Weakness

Now, let's connect this discussion of the vicissitudes of emotional dispositions to the earlier discussion of the intellectual emotions and the intellectual virtues. I hope it is immediately obvious that the emotions that are appropriate to intellectual activity can be effected just as can my feelings about my son's successes, or her feelings about political freedom. So, if being disposed to have the right intellectual emotions is part of what it is to be intellectually virtuous, then these vicissitudes can prevent one from virtuous intellectual activity.

I dare say that we have all, at one time or another, been susceptible to this loss of affect in our intellectual activities, and, if we have, we will surely appreciate just how debilitating it can be. We *know* that this new book or paper on just the topic that we are ourselves researching will be interesting and challenging, and we *know* that we ought to read it. But we have no curiosity, no wonder at what we read, no feeling of hope that we will find some answers, and no courage to keep on reading, to keep on asking questions. We no longer feel the keenness to write new material, merely going through the motions, driven by mere habit or by the requirements of one's job, churning out more and more variations on the same old stuff. Our intellectual life has gone cold on us.

We have names for the variety of causes of such loss of affect: depression, apathy, lack of resolution, demoralization, a feeling of hopelessness, sloth, lassitude, tiredness, and so on; terms which are often simply names of a problem, rather than explanations.²⁷ What can you do? In part, the answer will depend on prior answers to the epistemic questions I have just been posing. If it's a temporary blocking of the emotional disposition, then perhaps you should try to take exercise in the morning before starting work. But if it's permanent, then perhaps the best thing is not to keep on flogging the dead horse, but to give up altogether.

Religious Emotions

I would like to suggest that these ideas about intellectual emotions can be brought to bear on the religious emotions—that we have here a good model of how religious emotions are properly located in a good religious life. Let's see how things would look if I were right.

First, the right model for religious emotions wouldn't be the simple model, which skews the class of emotion towards what William James

²⁷Matthew Ratcliffe has a very helpful discussion of loss of hope, one kind of which is demoralisation. He notes that the latter has even been identified as a medical condition which is distinct from depression. See his "What is it to Lose Hope?" (unpublished paper), and D. W. Kissane and D. M. Clarke, "Demoralization Syndrome: A Relevant Psychiatric Diagnosis for Palliative Care," *Journal of Palliative Care* 17 (2001): 12–21.

called the *standard* emotions. So religious emotions needn't involve just bodily feelings; they needn't be immediate reactions to eliciting events in the environment; they needn't be selectionally advantageous, pan-cultural, and shared with other animals; they needn't typically arise without cognitive processing; they needn't be operationalisable.

Secondly, the better model for religious emotion would be the intellectual (and aesthetic) emotions—emotions directed in thought and feeling towards the object of the intellectual (or aesthetic) activity. Many of these emotions—such as delight, wonder, awe, courage, doubt, tenacity, and hope—will be common between the intellectual and the religious sphere; others—reverence and contrition perhaps—will be particular to religious experience. With this in mind, we can see a striking parallel between Newton's thoughts and feelings, bound up together, directed towards the coloured spectrum, and Descartes' thoughts and feelings directed towards God, as he expressed it in the final paragraph of his *Third Meditation*: "Here let me pause for a while and spend some time in the contemplation of God . . . and gaze at, wonder at, and adore the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it."²⁸

Thirdly, as with intellectual activity, we would find that having the appropriate religious virtues would involve having the appropriate emotional dispositions so that one would not be able to act or think virtuously without having the right feelings, towards the right objects, at the right time, and so on. And without the virtues one would not be able to lead a good life; so emotional engagement wouldn't merely be an optional extra but a necessary part of what it is to lead a good religious life.

And fourthly, religious virtues, including the relevant emotional dispositions, would be fragile. They would be susceptible to vicissitudes as they are elsewhere, or they would remain in place whilst their expression is blocked off by depression, apathy, weakness, accidie, sloth, tiredness, and so on, so that one's religious life goes cold on one—both judgement and action lack the emotionality that is a requirement of virtue. And then we would be faced with the same epistemic questions: what is the explanation of the failure of virtue—the failure to have the right feelings? And what would one be able to do about it in any particular case? Answers to these questions would not be easy to find. But that is surely to be expected once we have given up the simple model of emotion.²⁹

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²⁸*The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, vol. II, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Thanks to John Cottingham for this reference.

²⁹I would like to thank Sarah Coakley for inviting me to give a paper at the conference "Faith, Rationality, and the Passions" in Cambridge in January 2010, on which this paper is based. Thanks also to The John Templeton Foundation for their support for that conference, and to the various excellent contributions from the other participants. Thanks to Thomas Flint as editor of this journal, and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments, and to Matthew Ratcliffe.