

Aurel Kolnai

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Aurel Kolnai (1900–1973) is best known for his political and moral writings, but he also chiefly contributed to the phenomenology of the emotions. In a series of papers devoted to hostile and aversive emotions and, in particular, to disgust, haughty pride, fear, and hatred (Kolnai 1929, 1931, 1935 and 1998) Kolnai presents his most comprehensive views on the affective life and its ethical significance. Scattered discussions on the emotions can also be found in an early paper written on Scheler and under the influence of psychoanalysis (1925), in his dissertation *Der ethische Wert und die Wirklichkeit* (Ethical Value and Reality) (1927), which is his first phenomenological writing, and in later papers “On the Concept of the Interesting” (1964) and “The Concept of Hierarchy” (1971).

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first reconstructs Kolnai’s general approach to the emotions as embedded within the larger context of early phenomenology. Sections 2–4 present Kolnai’s analyses of hostile emotions by focusing on disgust, haughty pride, and hatred.

1. Kolnai’s General Approach to the Emotions

“Max Schelers Kritik und Würdigung der Freudschen Libidolehre” (Max Scheler’s Criticism and Praise of Freud’s Doctrine of the Libido) (1925), published in *Imago*, is the first writing in which Kolnai directly approaches the topic of the emotions. The text was written during a period in which Kolnai embraced psychoanalysis (he was trained in this movement by Ferenczi and Rank). His aim here is to defend Freud’s theory of the libido against Scheler’s criticisms in *The Nature of Sympathy*. Yet, anticipating his imminent turn to phenomenology, Kolnai ends by praising the phenomenological concept of the mind, as well as its methodology and ethics. Indeed, he even proposes to use phenomenology for a better understanding of psychoanalytical issues around normality and pathology, psychic development, repression, and sublimation.

Like Scheler, Kolnai rejects in this early writing a simplistic interpretation of the libido, according to which there is a single form of psychic energy able to generate the multifarious manifestations of our mind. Both agree that such a simplistic interpretation would lead to a

flattening of our psychic lives. For instance, applied to the case of the emotions, it would imply that all the different forms of love have their origins in the sphere of the libido and are derived from sexual love and can be explained as such. The simplistic interpretation would also suggest that it is impossible to distinguish between levels of emotional depth according to the hierarchy of the values toward which they are directed (1925, 143). That is, if all emotions were derived from the same kind of psychic energy, then they would be blind to different value-complexes and would intend the same type of value. These points of agreement with Scheler are mentioned in this text only *en passant*, but they are crucial in light of Kolnai's later contributions to the phenomenology of the emotions (see below and section 4).

Unlike Scheler, however, Kolnai claims that the Freudian concept of the libido already entails the possibility of making such differentiations in the field of the emotions. Furthermore, still against Scheler, he also considers the possibility that some emotions might be derived from others, observing that our emotions toward one and the same object might change, and that in this change one emotion is the source of the other. According to Kolnai's example, the love we experience for someone might transform unnoticed into hatred (or indifference). When this happens, the hatred conserves all the passion and energy of the previous emotion of love from which it emerged and which has now disappeared (1925, 143–144). Furthermore, he takes the possibility of mixed emotions for granted. In fact, he considers each transformation of an emotion into another to be a case of mixed feeling, claiming that though nobody experiences green as the mixture of blue and yellow, green can emerge from the combination of both. These topics will reappear in his analyses of the aversive emotions, and one can assume here that it is the influence of psychoanalysis that explains Kolnai's lifelong predilection for topics concerning negative, ambivalent, and mixed emotions.

Apart from this early writing at the intersection between psychoanalysis and phenomenology, throughout the rest of his philosophical work on the emotions, Kolnai embraces the views of the early phenomenologists. This output comprises his three essays on the hostile attitudes: "Der Ekel" (On Disgust) (1929), "Der Hochmut" (Haughty Pride) (1931), and "Versuch über den Hass" (Essay on Hatred) (1935), as well as the later paper "The Standard Modes of Aversion: Fear, Disgust and Hatred" (1998) written during the '70s at the request of David Wiggins as a summary of his key claims about phenomenology of the aversion and posthumously published in *Mind*.¹ In all these texts, Kolnai employs exemplarily the phenomenological method (and, in particular, the eidetic reduction), distinguishing the analyzed phenomena from cognate ones, identifying and describing their essential traits, and elaborating taxonomies. In his analyses of the hostile attitudes, Kolnai also endorses a specific

view of the emotions according to which they are intentional phenomena based on cognitions, which are capable of disclosing the realm of values to us. In embracing this view, Kolnai echoes the general idea of emotions as intentional phenomena put forward by Brentano's followers within early phenomenology and the Graz School: namely Scheler, Pfänder, and Meinong.²

However, in his text on the aversive emotions, Kolnai only explicitly refers to such a view on one occasion. More concretely, in his later text "The Standard Modes of Aversion", he refers to the emotions in terms of "emotive responses", a concept that he describes as follows:

"[emotive responses are] something closely germane I think to Meinong's *emotionale Präsentation*, meaning thereby acts or attitudes or conative states of consciousness which on the one hand are clearly governed by an intentional object, and on the other hand express something like a passion aroused in the self, an impact exercised upon it down to its somatic sounding-board; in other words intention (*Gegenständlichkeit*) as linked essentially, though not in a uniform or unequivocal or causally necessary fashion, to condition (*Zuständlichkeit*)" (2004b, 94).

There are two features of the emotions mentioned in this passage that I will take as a point of departure to reconstruct Kolnai's more general view using the references, observations, and comments scattered among his other works. Kolnai characterizes emotions as having an intentional and an experiential moment, which he refers to as "intention" and "condition" respectively.

Regarding the moment of intentionality, Kolnai's view might be characterized by way of the following three aspects. (1) First, he endorses a "cognitive model" according to which emotions require *cognitive bases* in order to occur. More concretely, perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs present us the objects toward which the emotions are directed. This view can be directly derived from Kolnai's examples: To feel fear requires a perception or a thought (2004a, 36); to feel disgust toward an insect requires a perception of it; to feel contempt requires a belief in another's inferiority (2004a, 82) (for similar views on the bases of the emotions, see, for instance, Meinong 1968, 35).

(2) Yet, Kolnai does not conceptualize the intentionality of the emotions in terms of the intentionality of these other states on which the emotions are based, but rather, like many of Brentano's followers, he understands such intentionality of the emotions as a *sui generis form of reference* toward their objects (illustrative of this view is Scheler 1973, 256). In other words, the fact that emotions require cognitive bases does not imply that emotional experience might be reduced to them, nor does it suggest that emotions' intentionality is derived from their cognitive bases.

(3) To be precise, this original emotive intentionality consists in *disclosing values*. That is to say, values can only be grasped or presented by our emotions. Emotions are unique not only insofar as they are directed toward an object, but also insofar as they present this object to us as having a certain quality. Kolnai defends this position already in his dissertation, but it also appears in his text on disgust, in which he attributes to this emotion a cognitive and ethical function (Kolnai 2002, 67; 2004a, 81). In this regard, Kolnai advocates a “perceptual model” of the emotions (for a similar model, see Meinong 1968, 117; for a different idea of the relation between emotions and values within early phenomenology, see Scheler 1973, 256).

These three claims should be interpreted within the boundaries of value realism. Value realism is a term used to encompass a wide range of positions, which claim that values are objective. Such value realism was widely accepted among early phenomenologists. In this view, rather than constituting a projection of my emotional state onto the world, my disgust reveals a certain quality of the object toward which it is directed. Kolnai’s commitment to value realism is clear not only in his dissertation on the ethical values and in his texts on the hostile emotions, but also in later texts such as in “On the Concept of the Interesting” (1964). Here he claims that while people are interested in different things, the concept of “interesting” cannot be reduced to a mere sense of being interested in something. In contrast, Kolnai characterizes the interesting as that which evokes interest without appealing to one’s interests (1968, 167–169).

It is in the frame of value realism that we have to understand Kolnai’s description of emotions as emotive response. This idea implies that values are given to us with the sufficient authority to “call”, “demand”, and “require” us to react emotionally in a certain way. In this sense, the early phenomenologists spoke of the emotions as “responses”, “answers” or “reactions” to a certain kind of object, as “stances” or “act of position-taking” toward such objects. Although he mentions Meinong here, this idea can also be found in early phenomenologists like Scheler, Reinach or von Hildebrand (see, for instance, Scheler 1973, 256; Kolnai employs this terminology in his dissertation: 2004, 63–64).

Related to the feature of intentionality is the idea of emotional depth, which Kolnai already mentions in his earlier text. The idea of emotional depth, also known as the “stratification thesis”, was originally proposed by Scheler, according to whom we can distinguish between different levels, strata or layers in our emotional life: sense feelings; vital feelings; psychic feelings; and feelings of the personality. In Scheler’s view, each of these strata constitutes a class and is responsible for being directed toward specific value-complexes, which, according to Scheler, exist in a hierarchy (Scheler 1973, 330). In general terms, Kolnai will take up this claim as is clear in his analysis of hatred as a phenomenon that is rooted in deep strata

of our personality. However, he will also introduce some refinements of his own. In “The Concept of Hierarchy” (1971), Kolnai considers Scheler’s model as an expression of a hierarchical and rigid form of thought, in which some aspects of life, which usually appear merged together, are isolated, whereby some layers of values are overestimated over others (for instance, he deems vital values to be inferior to the spiritual ones) (Kolnai 1971, 203–221; see also Kolnai 2004c, 56).

Besides intentionality, emotions are also characterized by an experiential moment. Kolnai observes that emotions are linked to bodily responses, and that by virtue of these some emotions are more “bodily bound” (*Leibgebundenheit*) than others (2004a, 32). Although he does not develop this point further, it is important to note that this idea of *body-boundness* is committed to a specific view of emotions according to which they are phenomena of the lived body (*Leib*) and not just mental states accompanied by concomitant physical manifestations of the physical body (*Körper*) (cf. Scheler 1973, 398). In this regard, he speaks of a “coloring”, “accent” and “quality” (2004, 29), or of a “fundamental tone” that is characteristic of each emotion (Kolnai 2007, 100). It is precisely by virtue of this feature that he claims that the aversive feelings of disgust, haughty pride, and hatred share a similar coloration, namely a refusal of their object (2007, 100).

2. On Disgust

The first of Kolnai’s writings on the hostile attitudes is “Der Ekel” (On Disgust) (1929). The contribution is unique not only because, at the time of its publication, disgust was typically dismissed as a topic of philosophical research, but also because, rather than treating disgust as a biological reaction or an instinct, Kolnai’s approach signals that the phenomenon of disgust performs an important cognitive and ethical function. More specifically, with differences of coloring, all types of physical and moral disgust point to the same quality of the disgusting and are reactions to certain objects, “which are constituted in such a way that they refer in a determinate manner to life and to death” (2004a, 72).

Disgust is analyzed in the text by means of a comparison with fear (which, in Kolnai’s view, comprises both fear (*Furcht*) and anxiety (*Angst*) (2004a, 36) (cf. Freeman and Elpidorou in this volume). Disgust and fear are associated with strong bodily reactions; both have the character of a response toward an aspect of the world; and both display “psychic depth” in the sense of being able to mobilize central aspects of the person who experiences them. Furthermore, both display a twofold intentional reference toward their objects: they intend the

object or state of affairs that provokes them and, at the same time, they intend the well-being of the subject who experiences them (2004a, 36).

Despite these similarities, Kolnai also notes significant differences between fear and disgust. Fear is intentionally directed toward an object that concerns the survival of the subject. As Kolnai puts it, it is inseparable from the concept of “threat, danger, rescue and need of protection” (2004a, 37). Disgust displays an intentionality of a different kind, which, according to Kolnai, is more “uniform”, i.e., focused more on the object and less on the survival of the subject, in part because the feeling of disgust does not affect the totality of the subject’s existence (2004a, 40). In short, unlike fear, disgust is more outwardly oriented toward the object and it is not directed toward the self in the same way. Relatedly, there is a second key difference. According to Kolnai’s perceptual model of the emotions set out above, while in fear we become aware of a danger, in disgust it is not just that we become aware of some object as disgusting, but we are also able to grasp specific moments and features of the disgusting object. Disgust is directed toward the intrinsic constitution of the object, which is grasped in its details. Thus, Kolnai attributes to disgust a cognitive dimension that is lacking in fear.

A further common feature concerns the mode in which both emotions are experienced. Both fear and disgust appear to be connected to strong bodily reactions and bodily movements that suggest the avoidance of their respective objects. However, also in this respect, there are interesting differences. While the evasive behavior of fear culminates in flight, disgust avoids its object while remaining attached to and captured by it. As a result, Kolnai identifies a further essential feature of disgust: the paradoxical and ambivalent relation to its object. This claim—namely that in disgust there is a moment of desire—has clear psychoanalytical resonances, but Kolnai at the same time distances himself from this tradition: while psychoanalysis understands disgust as a consequence of a desire suppressed by civilizational norms, Kolnai attributes to this emotion a cognitive function that cannot be explained as an expression of internalized social norms.

On the basis of this characterization, Kolnai elaborates a typology of disgust concerning its objects and functions. In terms of its objects, he distinguishes between a physical and a moral disgust. Physically disgusting are phenomena associated with the process of putrefaction, excrement, bodily secretions, materials that adhere to the subject (such as dirt), some animals (such as insects and rats), the unwanted nearness of the human body, an exuberant fertility, disease, and bodily deformation. Moral disgust appears in cases of satiety, of an unfurling vitality that is misplaced or excessive, in cases of lies, falsehoods, and moral weakness. Both types of disgust differ in their respective objects, but according to Kolnai, they both share a

similar structure: there is an isomorphism between the physically and morally disgusting. In this vein, he describes the phenomena of lying and mendacity—which for him are paradigmatic cases of moral disgust—as phenomena that display a slimy and dirty vitality, which is analogous to the disorganized vitality characteristic of the objects of physical disgust (2004a, 69).

Regarding their function, he distinguishes between disgust aroused by breaking a norm and disgust aroused by satiety (2004a, 59). The first type emerges after the violation of a rule that forbids putting us in contact with certain objects that are dirty, rotten or that might endanger us. The idea of a surfeit disgust, which is one of Kolnai's original contributions in this paper, refers to an experience that in normal circumstances is pleasurable, but in being constantly repeated its object and its enjoyment become disgusting (2004a, 63). This might happen, for instance, when over a long period of time we are offered our favorite cake every day, but after a while we come to think that enough is enough.

The most striking claim of the paper concerns Kolnai's attribution of an ethical function to disgust. Kolnai ascribes to disgust the capacity of indicating the presence of an unethical quality: the morally putrid or putrescent (2004a, 81). The subject of disgust experiences in this sense a visualization of the process of moral putrefaction of the person. Thus, although is not a primary experience of evil, the experience of disgust might point to it. In addition, from another perspective, disgust can also play a role in one's moral life: disgust can give rise to moral judgments. These judgments, however, can never be sufficiently grounded to determine our general attitude toward an object. Moral judgements based on disgust might be inappropriate, since they tend to lead to an incorrect stigmatization of its object. By the end of the paper, Kolnai touches on the topic of love as the only means at our disposal to overcome the strong aversive emotion of disgust.

3. On Haughty Pride (*Hochmut*)

“Über den Hochmut” (On Haughty Pride) (1931) is the second of Kolnai's papers devoted to the phenomenology of the hostile.⁴ The term *Hochmut* is used to refer to a specific phenomenon whereby the subject remains self-centered and is unable to recognize the values of others. The main features of this phenomenon are fleshed out by means of a comparison with feelings of self-worth, pride, vanity, conceit, individualism and haughtiness, as well as with attitudes such as the epistemological subjectivism).

One of the text's main achievements consists in establishing a distinction between two different phenomena, which in lieu of a better expression in English I will refer to as two

variants of “pride”: *intentional pride (Stolz)* and *haughty pride (Hochmut)*. On the one side, according to Kolnai, there is a kind of pride (*Stolz*) that is intentional in nature. It is directed toward an object, another person or oneself. In this regard, we can be proud of something we possess or something we have achieved, we can be proud of someone and of ourselves. In either case, this pride is based on the value of the object toward which it is directed. On the other hand, there is the phenomenon of *Hochmut* in which, rather than being directed toward an object or a person, the subject remains self-centered. This kind of pride is grounded not on objective values, but rather on an accentuation of one’s own self. Kolnai also observes that this self-centeredness is not reflected in the English term of “haughtiness” (2007, 67). Haughty pride is characterized by blindness toward the values of others and by an impoverishment of the nexus between the human being and the interpersonal world. Kolnai determines the difference between the two phenomena by observing that someone who feels proud of something (*Stolz*) enjoys the splendor of his valuable things, whereas in the case of haughty pride the subject experiences herself as the source of magnificence.

The differences between the two phenomena make it impossible to interpret haughty pride as derived from or as an extension or generalization of intentional pride. Haughty pride is not a form of intentional pride directed toward oneself. The two emotional phenomena differ in their structure. First, as already mentioned, to be proud of something (*Stolz*) has an intentional structure, i.e., it is directed toward something or someone, while haughty pride remains focused on oneself. Second, intentional pride presupposes that we have grasped the values of the object or of the person we feel proud of. Thus, intentional pride might fulfill a positive function in our lives, making us aware of the values we care for. Haughty pride, by contrast, does not result from a comparison between the values of the subject with the values of the objects and the others; rather it is an a priori attitude of the subject, which considers the world to be lacking value (2007, 77 and 92). From this we can conclude that intentional pride exhibits the typical features of an emotional response: it is intentionally directed toward its objects, based on cognitions, it grasps values, and it is bodily felt, while haughty pride has the character of an emotional attitude, is deeper rooted in our personality, and affects how we encounter the world.

Kolnai elaborates a typology of some of the manifestations of haughty pride. 1) Isolating pride (*Abschließungshochmut*) denies the value and the reality of all things that are not one’s own self, which leads the subject to being isolated and lacking an interest in the world. This attitude becomes manifest when the subject focuses only on those few things that represent one’s own self or when one has only a practical interest in them (2007, 77); 2) Haughty pride also becomes manifest in the demands of domination and success (*Herrschafts- und*

Leistungsansprüche) (2007, 80). Think, for instance, of the tyrant whose attitude toward his subordinates is one of contempt, or those types of the arriviste who fight to achieve their goals just because they are theirs; 3) Kolnai also considers certain forms of pantheism as cases of haughty pride; 4) He analyzes forms of haughty pride derived from a person's 'inner' (in)security; 5) In respect of the value objects of pride, he establishes a distinction between internal and external pride; and finally 6) Kolnai analyzes some nuances in the conduct of the person pervaded by haughty pride by attending to how this attitude is related to contempt and inattention.

Haughty pride, as a human attitude, can be combated only with the cultivation of humility (*Demut*), which Kolnai deems to be an affective attitude in which the human being, in comparing herself with an ideal, recognizes and accepts her own finitude, fragility, and imperfection (2007, 96).

4. On Hatred

Kolnai's "Versuch über den Hass" (Essay on Hatred) (1935) can be considered the first attempt to give hatred a place of its own in the phenomenology of the emotions. Like other forms of hostility—such as enmity, rejection, antipathy, disgust, and contempt—hatred is also characterized by a negative tone (*Grundtönung*) (Kolnai 2007, 100). But unlike those others, hatred represents and involves the entire person. Thus, Kolnai attributes to hatred "depth" as well as "centrality" (2007, 101), which means not only that hatred is rooted in those strata of our personal life that cannot be controlled at will, but also that it fills these strata to a maximal extent.

Typically, hatred is associated with an annihilating action tendency toward its object. This destructive impulse might be real or symbolic (e.g., humiliation, insult) (2004b, 105; 2007, 105). In contrast to other forms of destructive behavior, the annihilation inherent to hatred is always for its own sake. Thus, when in fear we destroy the dangerous object, we do so only because we consider this to be the only way to ensure our own safety, not because there is an intrinsic destructive impulse inherent to fear. In addition, all the manifold forms of destructive behavior motivated by hatred are univocal in intention: all aim at the destruction of their respective objects.

Hatred appears when there is a situation of fight and rivalry with someone to whom we attribute responsibility and ethical consciousness. The hated object must be apprehended as significant, powerful, and dangerous. According to its intentional structure, hatred is experienced toward what threatens and harms us and toward that which we consider to be evil.

As Kolnai puts it: “The intention of hatred is inquisitive, aggressive, propulsive. It impinges not only on the object as such but on its existential status in the world and thereby on the world itself, with an eye on its finiteness: the world is, as it were, ‘too narrow a place to hold us both’” (2004, 107). In Kolnai’s view, hatred is accompanied by a demonization of its object, which reveals what we take to be evil in the world (Kolnai refers to this as the “worldview of hatred” (“*Weltbild des Hasses*”) (2007, 132). Furthermore, the object of hatred is influenced by biographical elements. Thus, while disgust is a reaction to an aspect of the world, hatred is not a response toward a felt value because there is no such hypothetical quality of the “odious” (cf. also Schmid’s contribution to this volume).

There are two important questions regarding the relation between love and hatred that Kolnai addresses in his texts on the phenomenology of aversion. First, while the term love refers to the entire sphere of pro-attitudes, hatred has a much narrower scope (2004b, 105). In Kolnai’s text we can find two important observations in favor of the “asymmetry thesis” according to which love and hatred are not symmetrical opposites: 1) There are more *objects* that can be loved than objects that can be hated. One reason for this claim is that hatred can only be experienced toward persons and spiritual entities, but not toward physical objects. A second reason is that when we experience pleasure in something—when we like it and we affirm it—this might lead more easily to love than a dislike might lead us to hatred; 2) There are also more *forms* of love than forms of hatred. The ways in which we can engage with others are multiple and manifold, but the scope of our antagonistic relations to others is more limited. Only when the interpersonal nexus with others and/or oneself is broken might hatred appear. The entire web of life, however, is mostly dominated by love (2004a, 35; 2004b, 105; 2007, 128).

A further question concerns the possibility of emotional ambivalence (2007, 125). Kolnai vigorously rejects the possibility of simultaneously loving and hating the same object and denies emotional ambivalence. However, he acknowledges that both attitudes (love and hatred) might appear intertwined in the phenomenon of hatred. Whereas we can experience a love free of hatred, there is no hatred free of love. Love is a far more primary and pervasive attitude than hatred, since the latter only appears where and when the positive bonds with the world are broken. This observation already gives us an idea of the possible ways of overcoming hatred: the cultivation of an attitude of love.

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¹ According to Wiggins, the text was probably written between 1969 and 1971 (Wiggins 2004, 108). However, a letter written to Wiggins on the 20th November 1968 suggests that they were discussing the topic already in 1968 (Kolnai *Nachlaß*, CEPPA (St. Andrews), Box 8, Folder 6).

² On Brentano's, Pfänder's and Scheler's account of emotions, see, respectively, the contributions of Montague, Uemura and Yaegashi, and Schloßberger in this volume. On Kolnai's theory of the emotions as embedded in the phenomenological tradition, see Korsmeyer and Smith 2004, 1–28 and Honneth 2007, 143–175; for the main influences on his thought, see Kolnai 1999, 129–131 and Dunlop 2002, chaps. 4–6; for a recent discussion of his work, see Balázs and Dunlop 2005.

³ Cf. the similarities with Miller's (1997) anatomy of disgust in contemporary philosophy..

⁴ I translate "Hochmut" as "haughty pride" following a suggestion done by Kevin Mulligan.

⁵ In Pfänder's (1913/1916) and Scheler's (1973) analyses, hatred occupies only a secondary place compared to love.