

are in a certain sense liberated, and so free to deploy in an even more creative manner than usual the auditory imagination that is ours.¹⁵

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¹⁵ Many thanks to Élisabeth Pacherie, whose astute comments, numerous suggestions, and sound advice regarding a draft of this paper helped greatly to improve it.

8

Long-term Emotions and Emotional Experiences in the Explanation of Actions¹

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1 Introduction

Emotions, and particularly human emotions, supposing they form a unified subject matter, are a messy and complex matter. It might seem that only the best literature – the works of Tolstoy, Proust or Musil, to mention some of Peter Goldie's favourite authors – can do emotions justice. Philosophers, it would seem, are bound to put forward etiolated theories that are true only of caricatures of real human emotions. It is Goldie's ambition to present an account of emotions that truly reflects the richness of the phenomena.

Let me start by saying that the enterprise is to a large extent successful. As Goldie hopes, the book achieves a deepening and a broadening of our everyday understanding of emotional phenomena. For example, his account of jealousy as an emotion that can be irrational and self-defeating, but also justified when legitimate expectations are involved, and his claim that jealousy might be considered as the price to pay for a certain sort of love, are sensitive and enlightening. And he seems right when he claims that the assessment of an emotion such as jealousy, and more generally, of a mood or a trait of character, has to be done holistically, by considering the mental economy of the whole person. As he writes: '[e]ven apparently insignificant

¹ A critical review of Peter Goldie's *The Emotion. A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000. References to page numbers are to this book.

traits, abilities, and habits can resonate through a person's psyche in such a way that their "addition" or "removal" could have dramatic and unforeseen consequences for the whole person: the "removal" of what is considered a virtue might, overall, have an effect of making the character of the person concerned one of which we, for all sorts of reasons, approve more, not less; and the 'removal' of what might be considered a vice might make the person overall less approved of [...]' (p. 235). As Goldie notes, we might think that a person would be better if less shy, but in fact, '[i]f she were less shy, her self-obsession might be unendurably tedious' (ibid.). This is an insight that is not only valuable in itself (and a consolation for the shy and jealous among us); it has important consequences for virtue ethics, or more generally, for ethical theory. The task of listing traits that ought to count as vices and virtues might well seem hopeless in the light of this consideration.

Another attitude with which I sympathize is Goldie's resistance against the over-intellectualisation of emotions. In particular, Goldie criticizes what he calls 'add-on theories' according to which an emotion consists in feelingless states, such as beliefs and desires, *plus* some psychological or physiological element. The question, I think, is to what extent Goldie manages to offer a different account.

2 Emotions as complex states

Emotions have often been thought of as states. More precisely, they have been thought of as relatively simple and possibly unchanging states, in essence not different from beliefs and desires. Actually, there have been many attempts to reduce emotions to beliefs and desires. Goldie argues against both the idea that emotions are simple and the view that they can be reduced to beliefs and desires.

A first point to note is that Goldie distinguishes between emotions and episodes of emotional experience, instances of the former being 'relatively more enduring than an emotional episode' (p. 11); an emotion, such as Pierre's love for Natasha or Marcel's jealousy for Albertine, can last for years. This distinction is similar to, but different from, the distinction often made between occurrent and dispositional emotions. My experiencing fear at the sight of a dog seems a good candidate for an episode of emotional experience and certainly counts as an occurrent emotion. My fear of dogs, which I have had since being overrun by a dog in my childhood, is a disposition to feel fear in certain circumstances; it will manifest itself when I am confronted with (what I take to be) a dog. However, this state is different from what Goldie calls 'emotion': an emotional disposition can last indefinitely and need not involve episodes of emotional experiences or bodily changes – I might be lucky enough never to encounter another dog in my

lifetime. Thus, it would seem that three items have to be distinguished: dispositions to have emotions, emotions in Goldie's sense and emotional experiences.

According to Goldie, emotions are at least 'typically complex, episodic, dynamic, and structured' (p. 12). What makes them complex is that they involve a variety of elements, such as, of course, episodes of emotional experience, which include perceptions, thoughts, feelings and bodily changes, but also a number of dispositions, such as the disposition to have further emotional experiences, thoughts, feelings or to act in certain ways. These elements are structured in the sense that they are part of a narrative in which the emotion is embedded. They can be described as episodic and dynamic, for 'the elements can come and go, and wax and wane, depending on all sorts of factors, including the way in which the episodes and dispositions interweave and interact with each other and with other aspects of the person's life.' (p. 13)

When one thinks of Pierre's love for Natasha or Marcel's jealousy for Albertine, such an account certainly makes sense. However, it does not fit well with all of the states that have, at some point or another, been counted as emotions. Think of amusement or surprise, two states that Goldie does not discuss. There are two replies that can be made. The first, which seems like an arbitrary linguistic regimentation, is to deny that such states are emotional. A better reply is to claim that such states are emotional experiences and not long-term emotions. They are comparable to the disgust one feels when seeing a rotten cadaver floating in a lake or the fear one experiences when the plane suddenly loses altitude. That would mean that some states, such as fear, could be both emotions (in Goldie's sense) and emotional experiences, whereas others – amusement, surprise and possibly disgust – could only exist in the form of an emotional experience.

But if so, why not consider that what we call 'emotions' are primarily emotional experiences? There seems to be two possible views here: Goldie's view that emotions involve a variety of different elements, such as emotional experiences, etc., and the view, shared by most philosophers and psychologists, that emotions are emotional experiences, states that are related to a variety of different elements in the sense that they influence and are influenced by the mental states and actions of the person. On the latter view, long-term emotions are claimed to be reducible to a succession of different emotional experiences. As Paul Ekman says: 'those who claim that emotions endure for much longer time periods are summing what is actually a series of briefer emotion episodes' (1994:16, quoted by Goldie p. 104). According to Goldie, common sense is on his side: '[t]he different elements of the emotion are conceived by us as all being part of the *same* emotion, in spite of its complex, episodic, and dynamic features' (p. 13).

Let me grant that it makes sense to distinguish between, on the one hand, long-term emotions, which involve more than emotional experiences, and, on the other hand, episodes of emotional experiences. However, as will become clear when discussing the explanatory role of emotional phenomena, emotional experiences are more important than long-term emotions.

3 Emotional feelings as feelings towards

Whether one accepts Goldie's view or the summation view, it remains true that emotional experiences and, particularly, the feelings that they involve, are central. According to Goldie, 'without at least episodes of such feelings, of which you can be more or less aware, an experience would not be an emotional one' (p. 69) and a long-term emotion, even if it does not involve feelings at all times, will nonetheless involve them every now and then.

This brings me to the main difficulty with Goldie's account. Is Goldie's conception of emotions as complex states really different from the add-on theory? On his view, what makes the difference is the nature and the role of feelings. The intentionality of emotions does not merely reduce to the intentionality of feelingless states, such as beliefs and desires. Emotions and, more precisely, emotional experiences involve 'feelings which are directed towards objects in the world, typically towards the object of the emotion' (p. 19). This is what Goldie calls 'feeling towards'. Now, to make good the claim that this is not an add-on theory, Goldie has to show that these *feelings towards* cannot be reduced to beliefs, desires or other non-emotional mental states *plus* some non-intentional feeling. It is not clear that he is successful. When he explains that feeling towards is '*thinking of* with feeling' (p. 19 and also 58), it is tempting to understand him as saying that what is involved is a representation *plus* a possibly non-intentional feeling. The same is true when he goes on to illustrate his account by saying that 'if I feel disgusted by the pudding, my feelings of disgust are directed towards some perceived or imagined property or feature of the pudding – its sliminess, perhaps – *which I apprehend as disgusting*' (p. 19, my italics). The feeling towards involved in disgust seems to reduce to an apprehension or a representation of something as disgusting *plus* some additional feeling.

This is not Goldie's view however. As he makes clear in chapter 3, feeling towards is different from thinking of *x* as *y plus* some feeling. He mentions two possibly related differences between thinking of something as having the feature corresponding to an emotion – something's being disgusting, for instance – and thinking of the same thing with feeling or, less misleadingly but also much less idiomatically, 'feeling towards that things as being a particular way or as having certain properties or features' (p. 58):

- a) there is 'a particular way of grasping the saliences of the object of the emotional experience' (p. 59), the 'whole way of experiencing, or being conscious of, the world [being] new' (p. 60), and
- b) there is a difference in content, although that difference might not be captured in words. (According to Goldie, 'there is no requirement to give a substantial characterization of what is the difference in content between thinking of something with feeling, and thinking of it without feeling' (p. 61).)

Thus, the claim is that feeling towards is different from (non-emotional) thinking in that it is a different kind of experience involving a different kind of content. So far so good. The problem, however, is that we are not told what this difference amounts to. It seems insufficient to merely rely on introspection here. It is clear that there is an introspective difference between believing or supposing that something is disgusting, or thinking of or representing something as disgusting, on the one hand, and feeling disgust, on the other hand. However, in order to show that feeling is not reducible to having a non-emotional attitude toward the content that something is disgusting *plus* some feeling, more needs to be said.² It is difficult to believe that introspection allows for such fine discriminations. Actually, I think that more can be said. In particular, Goldie himself could have said more.

Here is the suggestion I have in mind. Instead of saying that an emotional experience involves a non-emotional representation of something as being *F* (disgusting, loveable, etc.), one could say that the emotional experience is a necessarily emotional representation of something as being *F*, or more precisely, as being *F* to a certain degree. My disgust at the rotten cadaver represents the cadaver as being disgusting (to a certain degree), just as my visual experience of the red tomato represents the tomato as being red. The idea is simply that my disgust has correctness conditions: it is correct when the object it represents is disgusting, i.e., when it makes disgust appropriate.³ And one should add that it is proportionate when the represented degree of disgustingness is correct as well – the object makes the corresponding degree of disgust appropriate. Since the relevant properties are evaluative, one can say that emotional experiences are apprehensions or representations of values. This is not a terribly original view – it goes back to Alexius von Meinong and Max Scheler and has more recently been de-

² Goldie actually tries to say more when he compares feeling towards to believing (pp. 72–8). However, the differences he notes could hold between (non-emotionally) representing something as disgusting *plus* some non-intentional feeling and believing that it is disgusting.

³ Cf. Wiggins 1976. Goldie himself prefers to follow McDowell (1985) and claim that the response is one which is merited. One important question, which is not addressed, is what 'appropriate' means: is it a moral or an epistemic notion, for instance? See D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 for this question.

fended by Ronald de Sousa and myself – but it is certainly one which is both congenial to Goldie's approach and plausible in itself.⁴ Now, it could be that this is what Goldie wants to claim. Perhaps the somewhat obscure talk about *feeling towards that things as being a particular way* or about *feeling towards as directed towards some property*, can be construed this way. But if that is the case, he certainly could have been clearer.

On this suggestion, one can make sense of the particular way of grasping evaluative properties that is characteristic of emotional experiences. "What about the particular content?" it will be asked? Given the similarities between emotional experiences and visual experiences, a further step seems natural. In the case of visual experiences, it is plausible to say that the content is non-conceptual. By analogy, it can be said that the evaluative content of emotional experiences does not involve evaluative concepts. It would take me too far afield to defend this claim here. Let me simply say that it is made plausible by the analogy between perceptual illusions, such as the Müller-Lyer illusion, and so-called irrational emotions, an analogy which Goldie actually discusses (see pp. 74-6). We continue to see the lines as having different lengths even once we have realised that they are of the same length. Or consider the example, discussed by Hume and, before Hume, by Montaigne, of the man in a cage hung out from a high tower; the man feels fear though he is convinced that there is no risk of falling.⁵ As Goldie notes, it is natural to say that both visual experiences and emotional experiences are cognitively impenetrable. But given that cases such as the Müller-Lyer illusion have been used to argue that visual experience has a non-conceptual content⁶, it is natural to say that emotional experiences are at least partially non-conceptual; their content does not involve the corresponding evaluative concept, so that it is not necessary to possess that concept in order to have an emotional experience.⁷ Given Goldie's claim that emotional experiences are, at least to a certain extent, cognitively impenetrable, I can only wonder why he doesn't even discuss the idea that emotional experiences have non-conceptual content. In any case, I am inclined to think that Goldie could make good the claim that emotional experiences are distinct sorts of states which have distinct contents. If so, and contrary to first impressions, his account does not boil down to an add-up theory.

⁴ See Scheler 1913-16 and Meinong 1917, de Sousa 1987, Tappolet 1995, 2000. Note that even if his view nicely fits with realism about values, it is certainly not committed to such a stance.

⁵ See Montaigne 1588, livre II, chap. 12 and Hume 1739, p. 148. Note that it might well be the case that his conviction is misguided and that the man's fear gets things right.

⁶ See Crane 1992.

⁷ See Tappolet 1995, 2000. Charland 1995 argues that affect is a modular perceptual system and that feelings are nonpropositional representations.

4 Emotion and the explanation of action

Here again, and I couldn't be more sympathetic, Goldie's aim is to oppose the over-intellectualisation of most current explanations of actions in terms of emotions, that is, explanations which can be spelled out in the form of practical syllogisms. As Goldie rightly points out, explanations of action that consist only in an inference between propositions are consistent with the agent not experiencing any emotion at all. Consider the reasoning that starts from the thought that people making unjustified insults are bad and ends with the thought that the best means of getting one's own back on the person who made such an insult is to hit him. It is quite clear that no emotion need to be involved. Goldie seems right when he claims that '[a]cting out of emotion is not acting without emotion (explained by feelingless beliefs and desires) plus some added-on ingredient or ingredients. Rather, when an action is done out of an emotion, the whole action, and the whole experience of the action, is fundamentally different.' (p. 40). The question is: what does this difference amount to?

Quite generally, there seems to be two main possibilities. On the first one, emotions can be said to merely play a causal role in the explanation of actions. Jane's anger caused her to hit Jim. On this view, it is not clear that actions caused by emotions are free and intentional. In particular, it is not clear that they are done for a reason. On the second view, it is claimed that emotions can make sense of actions. This is the kind of account that Goldie puts forward. However, the role of emotion is not thought of as being that of a reason for the action. When considering the case of an action done out of love, Goldie claims that saying 'I did it because I love her' 'is not to give a further reason, for there is no further reason; it is rather to put in context all the reasons that you have already given – all the episodes of thought and feelings which are involved – by placing them in the narrative as part of the love you have for her.' (p. 42). What happens is that '[t]he complex web of thought and feelings is thus summarized, or concertinaed so to speak, into a single explanatory phrase: "Because I love her", and your having these thoughts and feelings are made *primitively intelligible* by reference to your emotion and to the dispositions which the emotion involves.' (pp. 42-3) To say that these thoughts and feelings are primitively intelligible simply means that they are best explained by the emotion in question.

The idea, then, is that an explanation in terms of an emotion places the action within the narrative corresponding to the emotion, that is, the narrative spelling out the different elements of the emotion and their relations. If so, the emotion is not the reason which explains the action. What we have, instead, is a sort of holistic explanation. The emotion gives the context in

which we have to understand the beliefs and desires which constitute the reason for the action.

Now, this might be true of long-term emotions. However, I think it misses an important point, which could easily be made within Goldie's framework. Emotional experiences, in so far as they are representations of evaluative properties, or, to put it less controversially, in so far as they are tied to the recognition of evaluative properties, can make sense of actions in their own way. The fear I experience when confronting a bear in the woods explains my running away because given this fear, my action is made in light of the perceived danger. There is no need here to further postulate a belief about the danger, not to speak of means-end reasoning about the best way to escape from the bear's claws. More generally, the action can be explained in terms of the value, or disvalue, which corresponds to the emotional experience.

Actually, Goldie is quite close to admitting this when he discusses a case of primitive, or animal-like fear, as he puts it. He writes: '[i]ntuitively, one wants to say that there is some sort of primitive *fearful recognition* by the zebra of, say the lion, and a response simply in terms of visceral reactions and an impulse towards flight.' (p. 46, my italics). And he notes that even in the case of human fear – the fear you experience when suddenly seeing a bus coming towards you, to take Goldie's example – it seems wrong to say that a belief that you are in danger is part of the causal explanation of your action. However, instead of simply acknowledging that the emotional experience of fear is what explains these actions, Goldie holds that even if the explanation is not a causal one – the beliefs and desires come too late for that and will rather be part of a post-rationalisation – it is nonetheless true that beliefs and desires can be appealed to in explaining such responses and the ensuing actions (see p. 46-7). This, it seems to me, is to show too much of an attachment to explanations of actions in terms of beliefs and desires.

Moreover, this approach is hardly consistent with the claim that emotions are, to a certain extent, cognitively encapsulated. Given this, some explanations or actions, be they causal explanations or post-rationalisations, could not be spelled out in terms of beliefs. The cases I have in mind are cases of akrasia, or more precisely, those cases Goldie calls last-ditch akrasia, namely, cases of akrasia involving deliberation. These are cases where an agent performs an action in spite of her all-things-considered judgement that another course of action is better. As Goldie rightly explains, the cognitive impenetrability of our emotional responses allows for a good explana-

tion of those cases of akrasia which involve emotions (see p. 111).⁸ Suppose that you believe that the spider on the ceiling is harmless, so that, all things considered, you judge that it is better to stay in the room than to run away. It might still be the case that you feel fear. Now, if you act akratically on this fear and run away, it would be quite unhelpful to explain or post-rationalise your action by postulating the belief that the spider is harmful. This would amount to saying that you have two contradictory beliefs. It seems more plausible to say that your action was done in light of the perceived danger, something which you were aware of in virtue of your emotional experience.

If this is on the right track, we must conclude that what really does the explaining is the emotional experiences, or more precisely, the feelings they involve and the correlated evaluative properties, and not the emotions understood as long-term states. If the long-term emotion allows for an explanation of the beliefs and desires it involves, it is because of certain values or disvalues which are recognised in virtue of the emotional feelings. One could say that these feelings, and the corresponding values, give the narrative its sense. No wonder philosophers have concentrated on emotional experiences.

5 Conclusion

I have been focusing on Goldie's account of emotions and their role in the explanation of action. In this conclusion, I can only point towards some of the main issues I have been neglecting. There is an excellent and empirically informed discussion of the question of whether or not, and to what extent, emotions are pan-cultural. Goldie quite convincingly argues that there are shared emotional capabilities, which are shaped by the culture and environment in which individuals are placed. In an attempt to defend the concepts of common sense psychology, he stresses the claim that science and common sense psychology are in a different business, the latter being normative and personal. As he puts it, 'our thought and talk of emotions is embedded in an interpretative (and sometimes predictive) narrative which aims to make sense of aspects of someone's life' (p. 103). The discussion of moods and traits of character is also of great interest. Drawing on the work of Robert Musil, an all too neglected author in philosophy and particularly in anglo-american philosophy⁹, Goldie argues that the difference between

⁸ Goldie's accounts of both last-ditch and impetuous akrasia are interesting. The only problem is that he does not consider the question of whether actions caused by emotions are free and intentional. This is important because so-called strict akratic actions, those that make for the hardest philosophical problems, are defined as free and intentional.

⁹ But see Mulligan 1995.

moods and emotions depends on the specificity of their objects, moods having less specific objects than emotions. This claim might be less than entirely convincing, but it is certainly worth a thorough examination. The moderate and informed defence of explanations in terms of traits is also of interest. In particular, Goldie offers a good discussion of Darley and Batson's Samaritanism study and Milgram's obedience study. Finally, the best chapter, in my view, is the one entitled 'How we think of other's emotions'. Goldie offers there a detailed and informed study of a) emotional contagion, b) emotional sharing, c) emotional identification – three concepts that we owe to Max Scheler, who insisted that they have to be distinguished from sympathy¹⁰ – d) our capacity to empathise, e) what Goldie calls 'in-his-shoes imagining', and d) the emotion of sympathy. Though it seems to me that Goldie underestimates the moral importance of both our capacity to empathize with others and the sympathetic emotions, such as compassion – he rightly stresses the partiality of sympathy, but he obliterates the fact that such emotions allow us to care about another's joys and woes and to act in a truly altruistic way – it is quite clear that his discussion will become a locus classicus for those who work in the philosophy of mind and in moral psychology.

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¹⁰ See Scheler 1912.