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EMOTION THE BASICS

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INTRODUCTION

It is sometimes said that human beings are rational animals – a view that we probably owe to the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who claimed that ‘reason more than anything else is man’ (*Nicomachean Ethics*, ch. 7). The idea that we are rational animals is not without its critics, however. In one of his *Unpopular Essays* from 1950, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, with his tongue somewhat in cheek, that he had been searching all his life for evidence that could support this claim. Even if we think that human beings have the capacity for reason, this is surely not all that we are. For it is equally plausible to regard human beings as *emotional* animals. Emotions, after all, play a central role in all areas of our lives: in our believing, planning, decision-making, and acting; in our personal relationships, social and political movements, and institutional structures; in artistic production and appreciation, sport and play, religious practice and devotion, and scientific inquiry; indeed, in pretty much every distinctively human activity. If we are to have a proper understanding of human life and activity, therefore, we ought to have a good grasp of the emotions. In particular, we ought to have an adequate answer to two basic questions. First, what are emotions? And second, what do emotions do? My aim in this book is to go some way to answering these questions, and in so doing provide some insight into a core component of all of our lives.

Answering these questions is not easy, however. One reason for this is that the answers to these questions are related. As a result, we’ll only get a proper answer to the first – which concerns the *nature* of emotion – once we get an answer to the second – which concerns the *point* or *function* of emotion. This is no surprise. In

many cases, we can only discover the nature of something by figuring out its purpose or use. (To see this for yourselves, try to explain what a watering can is, or a belt, or a cheeseboard, or an internal combustion engine, or the Large Hadron Collider, without any mention of what these things do.) The full account of what emotions are will therefore only really be apparent at the end of the book, once we've examined the many and varied things that emotions enable us to do, both in our individual lives, and in our relationships and dealings with others.

As these opening paragraphs indicate, I think that emotions are extremely important for human beings, and indeed for other animals. This view is, I hope, relatively uncontroversial: it seems pretty obvious that we value our rich emotional lives, and find it difficult to contemplate a good or happy life without emotion. (The portrayal of non-emotional beings as subjects of pity is a trope of science fiction films and TV programmes: such creatures are regarded as missing out on something important to, indeed central to, the good life.) What is perhaps more controversial is a theme that will run throughout the book, and pushes against common-sense thinking about emotion. This is the thought that emotions are valuable in many cases insofar as they are outside of, and indeed *run counter to*, rational thinking and deliberation. One of the things that I want to do in this book is to convince you that emotions have great importance precisely *because* they undermine or short-circuit our reasoning and reflection. Indeed, it seems to me that our happiness or well-being, and the flourishing of our social groups and institutions, depends upon this fact. Or so, at least, I want to argue.

I hope that by the end of this book you have a better grasp of what emotions are, what emotions do, and why we are often better off as a result of emotion, rather than reason, being in the driving seat. But I also very much hope that the book will be a stimulus for your own further thinking about emotions, and that getting a grasp of the basics of emotion will motivate you to learn more about this fascinating subject.

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The structure of the book is as follows. In Chapter 1 I outline at a very general level the kind of thing emotion is, and survey some of the main theories about emotion. This will give us a basic

model of emotion – as a phenomenon which involves various elements or components. I'll explain how each theory prioritizes one particular component, and suggest that each is correct with respect to a limited range of emotion. No one theory is plausible as an explanation of *all* of the things we regard as emotions, in other words. In later chapters I'll explain how the different components that are present in paradigmatic cases of emotion work in enabling us to live good and happy lives. Chapter 2 examines the 'epistemic value' of emotion: how emotion can help us in our believing, knowing, and understanding. I'll look in some detail at the emotion of curiosity, and the role of emotional attention, in helping us to gain vital information about and understanding of the world. Chapter 3 focuses on the vital roles that emotion plays when it comes to decision-making and action. Here I'll argue against the idea that decision-making is, ideally, a practice that is as free from emotion as possible. Instead, we'll see how decision-making is imbued with emotion, so much so that effective decisions would be nigh on impossible without it. I'll then look at how emotion is vital for motivating us effectively, looking in particular at the emotion of remorse. Chapter 4 turns away from the individual to focus on the social. Here I'll show how emotions are of great value for promoting and maintaining a variety of social goods: cooperative behaviour, personal relationships, and social and political movements. The particular emotions of love, indignation, and feelings of solidarity are used as illustrations here. In the concluding Chapter 5, I show how emotions are centrally involved in the distinctively human activities surrounding morality and art. In this chapter we'll see that without emotion, we wouldn't develop morally and could not be virtuous; equally, without emotion we would fail to engage with and understand works of art, literature, and music. I close by suggesting that something similar is true for scientific endeavour and religious practice. If so, the case can be made that emotion is at the heart of those distinctive practices that make us human.

something – a reason that has been at the heart of philosophical thinking since the time of Plato and other Ancient Greek philosophers – is that sometimes such knowledge is very important. Consider, to illustrate, the question at the heart of *The Republic*, Plato's most famous work: what is justice? As is often the way in Platonic dialogues, the character of Socrates (based upon the real-life teacher of Plato, and who represents Plato's own views) asks this question, and in reply receives from the other characters in the book either a list of just actions, such as paying back what one owes, or a 'definition' of justice, such as 'might is right' (i.e. that justice is what serves the interests of the powerful). Socrates is rightly dissatisfied with both kinds of answer. Citing examples is unhelpful, because this fails to give us the essence of justice – what it is in itself, what all particular instances of just actions and institutions and policies have in common. The latter definition is rejected because, well, it's clearly a terrible attempt at capturing the essence of justice: might is often far from right, as a moment's reflection on the actions of the rich and powerful will make apparent.

But it is very important for Plato – and for us – to know about the nature or essence of justice, to know what it is in itself. For how are we to set up just institutions, adjudicate competing claims in a just manner, embody this virtue in our lives and our relationships, teach this virtue to our children and to others, if we have no real idea of what justice is? We can't rely on particular examples alone, for these would fail to apply to all cases, and we need to extend and apply the concept when we face unfamiliar situations. The idea that it is just to pay one's debts fails to be of much help if we are worried about the justice of paying our debts to those who oppress and exploit us, or where paying our debts will leave us unable to feed our family, or when the person to whom we owe money will use it for nefarious deeds; and so on. Here knowledge of particular instances will be of little use; we need to have a way of telling what the right or just thing to do in these instances is, and for that – Plato and many other philosophers think – we had better know what justice itself is. And what is true of justice is true of other virtues – those excellences of character that, for the Ancient Greek philosophers, are central to living a good and happy life. How can we pursue wisdom, unless we really know what wisdom is? How can we be courageous, without a firm grasp of

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THE NATURE OF EMOTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

What are emotions? This question might strike us as a little strange. After all, in one sense we know perfectly well what emotions are, since we all have *experience* of them. We all, to a greater or lesser degree, know something about the nature of fear and anger, envy and pride, joy and delight, disappointment and regret, shame and guilt, jealousy and compassion, and many other kinds of emotion. We usually know when we are in these states, and – through their facial expressions and bodily behaviour – when others are as well. We know what anger and joy and disappointment and guilt *feel* like. We know the kinds of things they are responses to, and the kinds of things they make us do. By the same token, we are aware of certain general truths or platitudes about emotions: that sometimes you ought to listen to your heart, and that at other times reason should prevail; that sometimes it's bad to be overcome by emotion, and that at other times being overcome by emotion is a wonderful thing; that our emotions, especially our negative emotions, can make life a misery, but that our lives would be severely impoverished, indeed barely recognisable as human lives, without them. So we have – or nearly all of us have – considerable knowledge of our emotions: of the distinctive kinds of emotion we experience, of the ways in which emotions can help and can hinder our plans and actions, our relationships and careers, in short, our living as human beings.

Why, then, ask questions about or investigate further the nature of emotion? One very good reason for inquiring into the nature of

the nature of courage? So the Ancient Greeks did not think that knowing the nature or essence of things was a purely intellectual or abstract exercise, of little value beyond satisfying the curiosity of philosophers; instead, knowing the nature of things was vital for living well.

I think that something similar can be said about emotion. It is very important for us to know what emotions *are*, in themselves. It is very important for us to know what all of the particular instances of emotion have in common, in virtue of which they count as emotions rather than something else, such as sensations or thoughts or imaginings or muscle-twitches or visceral changes or firings of neurons. This is because knowing what emotions are would also seem essential for the practical business of living that we are all engaged in. Suppose that someone says – as they often do around the time of an election or a referendum – that one should vote with one's 'head' rather than with one's 'heart', that one should appeal to reason in deciding how to vote rather than emotion. But is this really true? Well, to judge the veracity of this we would have to have some idea of what the person or politician *means* by emotion. Perhaps it's true if they think that emotions are fleeting impulses or feelings, like twinges or urges. It's not obvious that important political decisions should be made on these grounds, any more than it's true that my fleeting impulse to sigh loudly in a boring meeting is a good reason to do so. But what if emotions are not fleeting impulses or feelings? What if they are highly complex, reason-responsive, informationally rich ways of viewing the world, and which often turn out to be *more* accurate and reliable than 'rational' deliberation or reflection when it comes to our decision making? (There is evidence casting doubt upon the reliability of reason alone when making decisions, as we'll see in later chapters.) The crude claim that one should vote with one's head rather than one's heart starts to look decidedly implausible, if *this* is what emotions are. So the question of how we should make decisions when emotions are involved will depend, to a large extent, on the kinds of things that emotions turn out to be. Without this kind of knowledge, the question of whether we should vote with our head rather than our heart won't be one that we can answer.

Let us take a different example. Suppose that someone suffers from crippling guilt, and that this is a great cause of misery and

suffering for them. As a result, we want to treat their emotional condition and alleviate their suffering. We now face an important question: what is the best way to treat them? And *that's* a question that will be difficult to answer unless we have some idea of what *guilt is*. Is guilt susceptible to modification by reflection and deliberation, or by other forms of cognitive therapy? This might be true, but only if it is the kind of state that is itself cognitive, at least in part. If emotions are simply bodily states, then thinking and reflecting about them will do little to change them – any more than my wishing that I had more hair will be effective in counteracting my baldness. Might a regime of mindful attention, or of physical activity, help to alleviate guilt? This might be true as well, but only if emotions are related in close ways to our capacities for attention, or have bodily components that would be susceptible to bodily changes. So we need to know what emotions are in order to treat them effectively. Here too a first-personal experience of crippling guilt will prove ineffective: this is why the person suffering from guilt seeks professional help in the first place.

To take a third example: suppose that we are, at a governmental level, concerned with important ethical issues, like the treatment of animals used in experimentation. One side of the debate maintains that human suffering takes precedence over animal suffering, precisely because humans are capable of feeling much more in the way of negative emotions – fear, despair, shame, guilt, and the like – than animals. The other side of the debate denies this, and argues instead that animals are capable of experiencing a much wider range of emotions, both positive and negative, than vivisecutionists suppose. How can we make progress on this question? It seems difficult to imagine how this could be possible without an understanding of what emotions like fear and anxiety are, and hence whether these are the kinds of experiences that certain non-human animals are capable of having. Once again, we can't rely upon our own particular experience of emotions to settle the issue – for the issue is, precisely, whether *non-human* animals are capable of the same kinds of experiences. And without knowing what emotions are at a more general level, we have nothing to say to answer *that* question.

I could go on, but will leave it to you to think of many more areas where a determination of the nature of emotion is important

for our actions and our decisions, the advice we give and take, the policies we enact or overturn. For all of these reasons, we need to get a better understanding of the nature of emotions, what are the distinctive features of emotions themselves, and what characteristic things they enable us to do. This is why a philosophical perspective on the nature of emotion is important – although of course philosophy is not the only game in town, since questions about what emotions are and what emotions do are prominent in fields such as psychology and neuroscience as well, and research in these fields is clearly important for informing us about the nature and role of emotion. Nevertheless, this book will constitute a philosophical perspective, since (i) I'm a philosopher rather than a psychologist or neuroscientist, so have to play to my strengths, and (ii) philosophy might be viewed as the discipline which, more than any other, is concerned with constructing general theories or views about the nature of central aspects of human life and experience: of free will, personal identity, morality, political obligation, consciousness, action, responsibility, and many others. As a result, in what follows I want to present a philosophical account of the nature of emotion: to help us get clearer on the kinds of things that emotions are, the kinds of things that emotions do, and – through this understanding – to illustrate the vitally important role that emotions play in our lives.

At this point another difficult question arises, however. For how do we *do* philosophy? How do philosophers think about the nature of emotion? How can philosophy help us to understand this part of our experience, or indeed anything at all? In the next section I'll say a little about this, before looking at more concrete proposals as to what emotions are.

1.2 HOW TO DO PHILOSOPHY (OF EMOTION)

Philosophers of emotion are concerned, to a large extent, with constructing and evaluating *theories of emotion*. Such theories are abstract structures that try to explain or capture the core or central features of emotion. These will be features that all emotions have in common, in virtue of which they count as emotions. Theories of emotion are then assessed in terms of whether they can capture or explain these core features better than their rivals. Most philosophical argument occurs

in this latter stage: does Theory A really do better, when it comes to explaining the central features of emotion, than Theory B? This is all a bit abstract, but it isn't very mysterious as a process. Indeed, it mirrors normal scientific theorizing. For scientific theories are abstract structures that seek to explain or capture certain sets of observable phenomena (e.g. concerning planetary motion). Scientific theories are then assessed in terms of whether they can explain the phenomena better than their rivals. Most scientific discussion occurs in this latter stage: does Scientific Theory A really do better, when it comes to explaining observations of planetary motion, than Scientific Theory B? To clarify things a little more, let us look more closely at the 'phenomena' in the case of emotions – namely, those core or central features of emotion that theories of emotion are meant to explain or capture.

Nearly everyone agrees that emotions have certain distinctive features or elements or components, which work together to enable emotions to do a variety of things. We can try to identify such features by reflecting on instances of emotional experience in our own lives, but also by talking to others about their emotions, engaging with emotions as portrayed or discussed in art and literature, and in other ways as well. Consider, to illustrate, a particular example: the emotion of *disappointment*. Try to remember an instance where you felt this negative emotion, and reflect on what was going on during this experience. Here is an imaginary case: suppose that you have auditioned for a part in the play, a part you have set your heart on getting. You have high expectations: you've prepared well, practiced the lines for the audition until you know them inside out, your drama teachers are full of praise for your acting ability, you've seen the other candidates at the audition and they are not up to much, and so on. And when the time comes, you *are* the audition: you are brilliant, pour everything you have into the role, feel delighted at the smiles and effusive reactions of the judges, and leave with a spring in your step. The next day you receive a text saying that they have given the part to someone else, and you feel a crushing disappointment. We can now ask: What is your disappointment *like*? What is going on in you, when you feel this way?

One element of your experience is a *perceptual* one: you read the text, have a visual impression of the words on your phone.

Another is *evaluative*: you think that this is a terrible, awful outcome ('How could they? I was so great!'). Your *body* reacts in certain ways: your shoulders slump, you start to cry, you curl up on your bed, your face takes on a particular expression. You *feel* terrible: your heart feels like it is going to break, there is a dreadful heaviness descending upon you, perhaps an ache or sickness in your gut. You are motivated to *do* something: to hurl the phone across the room, to scream and stamp your feet, to phone the casting director and say appalling things to them. Your *thoughts* and *attention* are engaged: you think again and again about the audition and what you might have done wrong; you think about how you are going to tell your parents or classmates or colleagues or friends; you think about stopping acting altogether – what's the point? – or instead about trying even harder for the next part; and your attention remains focused on what happened, so that it is hard to concentrate on anything else or get work done.

There will probably be some other things occurring when you *experience disappointment like this*. But on the whole we can identify six elements that go towards making up your disappointment. There is (i) a perception, (ii) an evaluation, (iii) a bodily change and expression, (iv) a feeling, (v) a motivation to act, and (vi) thinking and attending. These seem to be part and parcel of *paradigmatic* emotional experience. For all six seem to be present in normal cases of fear, anger, guilt, shame, joy, pride, surprise, disgust, and other standard cases of emotion. (You might want to check this for yourselves: reflect upon a recent instance in which you felt guilty, or angry, or afraid. See how these experiences fit the pattern above: how they all involve these six elements.) Although there might be 'outliers' that don't seem to involve six of these – perhaps boredom or ennui are emotions, or emotion-like, and yet don't involve much in the way of action-tendencies – central cases of emotion all plausibly do. So emotions involve some kind of perceptual experience – they are responses to what we see and hear, smell and touch; they involve some kind of evaluation or appraisal – when I'm ashamed I judge that my behaviour reflects badly on me, when I'm in love I regard my partner as adorable; they involve bodily reactions – anger involves tensed muscles, a furrowed brow, gritted teeth, muscle tension, increased heart-rate, and the like; they feel a certain way – when experiencing pride we

feel uplifted, when experiencing remorse we feel awful; they produce or promote action – we shout with joy, apologize out of guilt, run away out of terror; and they generate thinking – when afraid, we figure out escape strategies; when jealous, we plan our revenge on our rival.

Theories of emotion try, then, to capture or explain emotions, understood as states or traits having these elements, and are to be assessed on the basis of whether they can do so better than their rivals. At this point, however, some puzzlement might reoccur. For what *distinguishes* different theories of emotion, such that they can be regarded as rivals? Why don't theories just say that emotions typically or standardly involve all six components, and leave it at that? After all, such a view would certainly tell us something about what emotions are like – they are states or traits with these elements, and so we now have a better understanding of the nature of emotion itself. So where's the beef between philosophers and psychologists and neuroscientists of different theoretical camps or persuasions, and what motivates them to develop different theories which try to capture all of these elements?

There is a straightforward answer to all of these questions, grounded in the tendency – not just in philosophy, but across many physical and social sciences – to be *reductive* when it comes to definitions, or to saying what a thing is in itself. Because of this, theories of emotion can be distinguished in virtue of which of these components – perception, evaluation, bodily change, feeling, motivational tendency, thinking activity – they take to be truly essential to the emotion, or to be identified with the emotion, or to constitute what emotions *really are*. So theories prioritize one of these, and say that emotion really is (for instance) just an action-tendency, or an evaluation, or a feeling, while the other components are traditional accompaniments to emotional experience but aren't, themselves, *part of* the emotion. (Compare: although gold is typically beautiful, expensive, a common constituent of wedding rings, and the colour of wealth, these are not essential to what gold is; the essence of gold, what it is in itself, is a soft, malleable metal with atomic number 79, a noble and transition metal.) Philosophical theories are in the business, therefore, of claiming that one component is privileged, and constitutes what emotions really are.

Why do philosophical theories do this? There are a variety of pressures at work here. But perhaps the most obvious – present in

social-scientific and scientific theories as well – is the need to simplify phenomena, to try to understand something new by appealing to something that we already know about, and in so doing to try to explain reality using the smallest number of elements or components. This isn't a bizarre ambition to have: simplicity is a theoretical virtue, after all. Indeed, you might be familiar with 'Ockham's razor' – the principle, named after the English philosopher and theologian William of Ockham, that when it comes to explaining events or theories or phenomena, the simpler explanation is to be preferred. Given this, we should at least *try* to explain everything that emotions are and everything that emotions do by appealing to a smaller and simpler number of elements or components. In §1.4 I'll survey the main theories of emotion, consider the reasons that their supporters have given in their favour, and the criticisms that their opponents have raised against them.

It might, of course, turn out that none of these attempts to simply the phenomenon – to propose and defend the idea that one of the elements associated with emotion really is *the* emotion – is ultimately successful. Indeed, some are sceptical about this, precisely because the attempts to argue in favour of one or another theory over the past few decades have produced no consensus as to what emotions 'really are', and conclude that there is no one thing that emotions really are, but instead hold that there are different kinds of things falling under the broad and rather crude label 'emotion' (for this line, see Griffiths 1997). Despite this being a minority position, I'm sympathetic to such scepticism. In short, I don't think that any one theory of emotion can adequately capture *all* of the kinds or types of emotional experience, and I'll try to make this case after we have seen the theoretical options. Prior to this, however, I need to engage in some important background work. This will, for the main part, consist in bringing to light various complicating factors when it comes to thinking about emotion. From the standpoint of an easy read, this isn't ideal; it is messy and interrupts the flow if I raise difficulties even before I've started explaining what the main theoretical options are. But from the standpoint of understanding the phenomena, such work is vital. Better that you know the complex landscape you'll be encountering in the rest of this book forewarned and forearmed, than to wander blithely in, thinking that this will all be straightforward, and then

finding yourself lost. So §1.3 is something of a cautionary section: there is trouble ahead.

1.3 SOME COMPLICATIONS

We saw above that there are many elements or components that are associated with emotions, which make thinking about the nature of emotion a complex matter. But there are other reasons which hamper simple and straightforward conclusions about what emotions are and what they do.

The first is that the same term 'emotion' is used to refer to a very wide range of things, which when we look closely seem to be rather different from each other. Consider, at one extreme, the emotional response of bodily disgust – say, the disgust we experience when we smell contaminated food. This emotional reaction seems to be a reflexive, automatic, and bodily response to our environment. It happens quickly, it is out of our control, it doesn't seem to be responsive to our thoughts about the object (the durian fruit still smells disgusting, even though we know that it tastes very nice), and it seems to provoke an automatic bodily response: we move away from the object, pinch our nose, screw up our eyes, close our mouth. It is, finally, something that seems to be experienced by very young children and adults, and by humans and non-humans alike. It seems, in short, biologically basic, cross-species, hard-wired, and adaptive. Other emotions – some kinds of fear and anger, emotions like surprise and startle – seem similar to disgust in these respects.

Consider, at the other extreme, the emotional response of *Schadenfreude*, the experience of pleasure at the misfortunes or failures of others. Such an emotional response is about as far from a bodily reflex as you can imagine: it is highly complex, grounded in a network of thoughts, values, concerns, social rankings, meanings, and outcomes. To feel *Schadenfreude* requires significant cognitive abilities, alongside a status as a moral creature – for it's a vice and so a moral failing to take malicious pleasure in other's misfortune. *Schadenfreude* is something that we are responsible for and, to an extent, under our control. It is intimately bound up with our thoughts about the matter. It might be something that is found in some cultures, and not others. It is certainly not something that

young children and non-human animals experience. And yet this, too, is classed as an emotion. So one difficulty in trying to explain the nature of emotion is that the term or concept seems to refer to rather different things – so different, in fact, that some people think that they actually belong in different categories, a point we'll return to at the end of the chapter.

A second difficulty is this. Those who think about the nature of emotion come to the topic not with an intrinsic curiosity and a completely open mind. Instead, different thinkers have different methodologies, different disciplinary interests or stakes, different goals to be achieved, different aims and intentions. If you are a psychologist and interested in the emotions, you will be interested in emotions and models of emotions that can generate testable, empirical results. If you are a historian, your research will probably be focused on emotions as they are described and understood in different historical epochs, the ones that were prominent at certain times (such as *accidie* – a form of religious or spiritual apathy – in the middle ages; or patriotic fervour in various European countries in 1914), and the reasons why this might be. If you are a philosopher, although you need to take heed of empirical and historical work, your interests are probably not entirely driven by it. You might, instead, be interested in the conceptual features of emotions, in our introspective experience of them, in how people talk and think about them. *Within* philosophy, different disciplinary interests push people in different directions. If you work in moral philosophy, you will focus on those emotions that are central to our moral thinking and practice, such as guilt and compassion. If you work in aesthetics, you'll be more concerned with wonder and appreciation. Those who seek to 'naturalize' emotions will be apt to look more closely at those which are biologically 'basic'. And so on. This compartmentalization of interest and focus tends to lead to different accounts of what emotions really are: the different disciplines and subdisciplines each have their model of what a real emotion is, and different accounts of what the emotional 'outliers' are. This makes for much disagreement, and doubts about whether a fully comprehensive account of emotion is possible.

A third problem – and perhaps the main reason why progress in theorizing about emotion moves very slowly – is that improvements in our understanding would seem to require a grasp of a

great many different fields. Suppose, to illustrate, someone says that emotions are identical with bodily feelings – so that fear just is the feeling of heart palpitations, tensed muscles, hairs standing on end, etc. To be plausible, this view will have to have something to say about what feelings or perceptions of bodily changes amount to. But what is it to perceive a bodily change? That is by itself no small question. Suppose now someone objects that feelings of bodily change cannot be rational or irrational, and that this clashes with a long-standing tradition of holding that anger and fear *can* be rational or irrational. To address this criticism, we'll have to have some view about what it is for something to be rational or irrational. But that is a *massive* question. To assess the original theory, therefore, we'll have to delve deeply into these – and many other – questions. These will be questions on topics that are often controversial in their own right, and whose answers depend upon findings in other areas of philosophy and indeed in other disciplines.

A fourth complicating factor is that even a single emotion term – like jealousy – can seem to refer to very different things. Consider some examples. Suppose you see your partner smiling at the waiter, and feel jealous. This might be a relatively short-lived experience: your partner always smiles at waiters, as they once did the job and know that a friendly face makes the work much more pleasant. The momentary emotional experience quickly fades, and you are jealous no more. Suppose now that you see you partner flirting with a work colleague, and experience a rather more intense form of jealousy. This is a kind of longer-lasting emotional experience – the kind that generates arguments and slammed doors and accusations, the kind that simmers for days, and that – hopefully – dissipates when you talk things through, when you realize that it wasn't flirting, or that the work colleague isn't a threat, and so on. Finally, consider a person who is – over decades – jealous of his wife's success. Unlike the momentary twinge or the week-long episode, long-term jealousy seems to be a deep aspect of someone's character, rather than a simple mental state. But it seems perfectly appropriate to describe the state as one of jealousy, rather than something else. So we need to bear in mind what kind of event or state we are talking about when we talk about emotion. For some accounts of emotions will be more plausible with respect to some kinds of states, and less plausible with respect to others.

Finally, emotions share certain characteristics with states that are similar, but arguably not emotions themselves. Here I am thinking of states like moods, such as depression or anxiety or listlessness, and other states – like physical pleasures and pains – that have a distinctive feeling but which are perhaps only metaphorically termed emotional. Sometimes the distinctions will not be hard and fast: certain forms of anxiety appear to be rather close to fear. At other times the distinctions will be more obvious: a feeling of coldness isn't an emotional response, even though it might well generate one (e.g. of misery and unhappiness about standing at the bus stop for ages).

With these complications in mind, let us turn to some of the most popular theories of emotion, the reasons that some people have given for finding them plausible, and reasons that others have given for thinking them otherwise.

1.4 THREE THEORIES OF EMOTION

1.4.1 FEELING THEORIES

Emotions and feelings seem very closely linked – so closely, in fact, that some are tempted to *identify* emotions with feelings. After all, when we talk about our emotions we often mean to talk about our feelings, and vice versa: if I say that I am angry with you, this is understood to mean that I feel angry with you; if you say that you feel guilty about your behaviour, I take this to mean that you are guilty about your behaviour. If we are asked, moreover, to describe our emotions, and respond by describing how we are feeling, that answer is taken to be perfectly appropriate. By the same token, the question 'how are you feeling?' is understood to be a question about one's emotional state, rather than about one's current experiences of temperature or touch. Our language might therefore suggest that emotions and feelings are identical. So too might reflecting on our assessments ~~of~~ of emotions as negative or positive. Shame, for instance, is clearly a negative emotion; and the obvious reason why it is a negative emotion is that shame *feels* bad. Joy, on the other hand, is a positive emotion, and here too the reason seems obvious: joy feels good.

The best-known proponent of the idea that emotions are identical with feelings is the nineteenth-century American psychologist

William James. (He developed his view at the same time as a Danish psychologist called Carl Lange proposed, independently, a very similar account. The resulting theory is often known as the James–Lange view.) In a famous paper from 1884 in the journal *Mind*, called 'What is an emotion?', James proposed a provocative and very influential answer: emotions are identical with the feelings or perceptions of certain bodily changes. The answer was provocative because it completely reversed the traditional view of emotion that was widely accepted to that point. On the traditional account, emotions are psychological states that occur once we perceive some object or event, and which then cause certain bodily changes to occur. These bodily changes – often referred to as visceral changes, referring to that particular location in the body – prepare the subject to act appropriately in response to the object or event. Consider, to illustrate, an instance of fear: as the time of the judge's sentencing approaches, I come to feel afraid, and this state of fear motivates certain bodily reactions – such as increased heart-rate, rapid breathing, sweating, trembling, and the like. *The traditional view has it that emotions are psychological states that occur between a perception of some event (the judge's sentencing) and bodily reaction (trembling, etc.)*

James argues that this is entirely the wrong way around. He writes: 'My thesis, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion' (James 1884: 189). On his view, the bodily changes occur directly upon perceiving the object or event, and it is our feeling of these changes that is the emotion. The emotion doesn't come before the feeling of bodily changes, therefore. Instead, the feeling of bodily changes is the emotion itself. As James puts it, 'we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble' (ibid.: 190).

This was – and perhaps still is – a rather radical view. Indeed, James himself thought that 'the hypothesis is pretty sure to meet with immediate disbelief' (ibid.: 190). Nevertheless, he thought that there were very good reasons to believe that it is true, and that we ought to accept it, in spite of its radical nature. One argument that James gives – an argument that is supported by more recent empirical work – is that humans are biologically predisposed to