

Using Philosophy to Educate Emotions

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ON CRITICIZING INAPPROPRIATE EMOTIONS

We generally have a dim view of educating the emotions. Our reasons are presumably these: (1) we think we don't choose our emotions; they just happen to us. Therefore, we believe we have no control over them, and would be unable to learn such control even if we wanted to; (2) we are ignorant of any feasible scheme for emotional education; and (3) any likely scheme promises to be more difficult than it would be worth.

In contrast, it can be maintained that the emotions are judgments and **are**, to some extent, chosen. We learn to **allow** ourselves to be happy or unhappy; educating the emotions involves learning to adjust these allowances. Moreover, certain categories of emotion — conspicuously **caring** — can be conceived of as an aspect of thinking. As we learn to allow ourselves to care **appropriately**, our emotions assume their proper role in our experience and in our lives. Appropriate caring is neither easier nor more difficult to learn than sound reasoning. Like reasoning, it belongs in the philosophical core of the educational process.

Children can learn to distinguish reasonable from unreasonable modes of feeling, much as they can learn to distinguish reasonable from unreasonable modes of inference, through reading and discussing stories in which children in communities of inquiry think and feel their way through the problems they encounter in their lives. Gradually, they learn to cultivate habits of self-criticism and self-control, in which they do not permit themselves invalid inferences and inappropriate emotions, while allowing themselves the opposite.

Actually, the emotional education of the child begins with the child's early upbringing, during which period an entire armory of rewards and punishments is employed to assure that the child has the kind of emotional life that the culture deems right. After such upbringing, children are not likely to find it easy to modify the controls on their emotions in the direction of greater reasonableness or appropriateness. What one is taught to allow or disallow oneself in childhood frequently becomes fixated as one moves into adulthood, with the consequence that one finds oneself having feelings quite different from those conventionally called for by the situations one finds oneself in.

Unfortunately, human experience is so multi-leveled and complicated that it is no easy task to dissect it and discover just what it is that the situation one finds oneself in can be said to require. There are layers and layers of intersecting mo-

tives and intentions, demands and obligations, habits and impulses. For many students, the easy way out is to feel as they are expected to feel, much as they already think as they are told to think.

One of the best ways of preparing oneself to study the intricacies of one's own experience — particularly one's moral experience — is to study that of others in the more skeletal versions afforded us by literature. Given a narrative, we quickly discover that each moral act or mental act or comment or emotion can be traced back to those of its causal antecedents that are contained in the information given. We consequently are often able to make judgments about the appropriateness of the feelings of the various characters in the story, as well as judgments about whether the characters were able or unable to allow those emotions to take place. We learn the procedure in literature; we practice it in life.

Children are taught to manage their emotions much as they are taught to manage their erotic and excremental needs. One child learns that only crying will get him what he wants; as a result, even when grown, he whimpers whenever he wants to request something. Another child learns that no amount of crying will get her what she wants; she is allowed to cry and cry and no one will care for her. In time, she becomes apathetic — it's no use asking for anything. Still another child overreacts to approaching discomfort and has tantrums of crying and rage at the first faint signs of need. Thus, we have different levels of emotional tolerance, and we soon learn from our families how we are expected to respond to and control these powerful forces that attack us from within.

When we read literature, we may discover that other children in other cultures experience discomforts and frustrations similar to those we experience. Some of these children may be found attempting to deal with their problems in much the same way we attempt to deal with ours. It is comforting to learn these evidences of emotional universality. We may be puzzled to discover, however, that other children understand the meaning of their emotions quite differently, either because their cultures have taught them these different interpretations, or because the children themselves have arrived, through their own inquiries, at a quite different understanding.

What is more, the authors of children's stories may relate not only the **causes** of the emotions of the characters, but the **reasons** as well, and it can

come as a decided shock to a child to learn not only that similar events arouse different feelings among different children, but that children have different reasons for allowing themselves to have such feelings. Of course, those children who are masters of pretense and dissimulation will know immediately what is going on when they read of someone choosing his or her emotion, and they will look covertly at one another and grin, in an effort to confirm that understanding. Such knowledge is part of the secret lore of childhood that children forget as they grow up, but not before they have passed it on to other children. It is to this same independent and somewhat insubordinate child's mind that Mother Goose appeals, as well as Swife and Munchausen and Mark Twain.

It is in our homes and with our families that we learn to speak, to reason and to feel. If we fail to learn our lessons well, the remediation is carried on in the school. We learn grammar to correct our errors in speaking and logic (perhaps) to correct our errors in reasoning. It is not clear to what extent the schools help us choose what and how we feel. Literature, as I have said, can be an important resource. Our peers are, of course, another. We are insatiably curious as to why Johnny is sitting at his desk crying. Not so much what **makes** him cry as what **reason** he has to cry. Is his crying proportionate to the injury he has suffered? For that matter, is the injury he thinks he has received proportionate to the extent to which he was wounded? And was the other person justified in hitting Johnny as hard as he did? Our little, surreptitious community of inquiry then whispers together about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of what happened and of the emotions manifested, and we struggle shakily towards a verdict. It is a verdict we do not forget, when it comes to be our turn to select the emotion that will alter the face we turn towards the world.

EDUCATING EMOTIONS USING PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

The Philosophy for Children curriculum was designed to represent the life of inquiry in a classroom community. It, therefore, attempted to do justice to the affective strand of experience, as well as to the cognitive and valuational strands. As an example, let us consider the first chapter of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. Since this chapter is well known for its focus on formal logic, it should

not be subject to the charge that it is unusually affective.

Within the first chapter, there are three moments in which feelings or emotions can be said to play a significant role. The first moment is that of Harry's "dreadful embarrassment," when he is found to be daydreaming when called on by Mr. Bradley and is laughed at by the class. The second moment has to do with Harry's flash of "resentment" when Lisa offers him an example that doesn't work as he had expected it to. The third moment is Harry's crowning "happiness" at the end of the chapter.

a. The moment of embarrassment

When Harry is revealed by Mr. Partridge's question to have been in the midst of a reverie, in which he was picturing to himself exactly what Mr. Partridge had been talking about, he does not seem to have been embarrassed. His mind may have "wandered off," but it did not depart from Mr. Bradley's lecture; instead, Harry was illustrating that lecture for himself and, thereby, thinking about it all the more deeply. This is why he tries to clear his mind and answer Mr. Partridge's question: as yet he feels no shame.

Here he is frustrated; he has no idea of the answer the teacher wants. He toys with the idea of distracting Mr. Bradley with a joke, but it is a feeble idea that he soon reconsiders. But it should be emphasized that Harry's moment of "awful embarrassment" has not yet begun. He is not ashamed of having a vision of the solar system; he is ashamed when the class laughs at him. And this is understandable. It is one thing to be merely different. It is another thing to be wrong. It is still something else to be an object of ridicule **because** one is wrong. If this is the situation that evokes Harry's emotional response, can we say whether that emotion is appropriate or inappropriate? A certain amount of embarrassment is what one would normally expect from virtually any child who has been derided by his peers. He or she might try to overlook the ridicule, but such detachment is not easily achieved.

What about the appropriateness of Harry's embarrassment in terms of the situation it addressed? If, by this, is meant the question of whether comets are or are not planets, surely both the class's ridicule and Harry's feelings of shame were simply irrelevant. Since the matter under discussion in the classroom offers the students no good reason to laugh at Harry, **he has no good reason to**

be ashamed for providing an incorrect answer.

This brings us, thirdly, to the situation which Harry's embarrassment provokes. This is a paradigmatic and normative situation, one which we feel "ought to be" whenever we have an experience of "what ought not to be." To encounter a single starving child is to be stimulated to imagine a world from which starvation has been eliminated. It takes only one...

The derisive laughter of the class is a signal of their lack of respect for Harry, and that signal, in turn, may conjure up in this victim an image of the community of inquiry that **ought** to exist in the classroom, a community in which mutual respect would prevent this kind of behavior from emerging in the classroom and causing the humiliation that Harry experienced. We do not know, for we are not told, whether Harry experienced this image of an ideal social experience even for a moment. All we know is that for the remainder of the book, Harry acts as if he had been called upon to bring that kind of community about in his classroom.

Thus, the problematic nature of Harry's embarrassment, when inquired into as a classroom of inquisitive students might inquire into it, leads to the question of the problematic nature of the derisory conduct of the class and this, in turn, leads to the possibility of the idealized concept of the community of inquiry. But something else should be added: the **logical** issue that transfixes Harry at this very moment is **conversion**, in which the question is raised as to what circumstances permit logical reciprocity and which do not. Surely, the mocking and taunting of the class would tempt many of us to reciprocate (and not just to bask in the thought of an ideal situation). But Harry would hardly be able to avoid the realization that this would be to seek vengeance, and he is unsure about the legitimacy of such ethical retaliation. As his logical rule has suggested, because A does something to B, it does not follow that B must, in return, do the same thing to A. So the **topic** of Harry's thought, reciprocity, is relevant to the ethical situation that originally provoked his humiliation.

b. The moment of resentment

Harry asks Lisa for a sentence "with two things in it," meaning, presumably, a subject and a predicate, each in the form of a noun. He even provides her with a few examples. After some thought, in which she chooses her own substitute terms, Lisa

replies with a sentence that fails to work in accordance with Harry's conversion rule. Harry can't understand why the illustration Lisa gives turns out to be a counter-example. With a flash of resentment, he wonders why Lisa has given him "such a stupid sentence":



But then it occurred to him that if he had really figured out a rule, it should have worked on stupid sentences as well as on sentences that weren't stupid. So it really wasn't Harry's fault.¹

So Harry exonerates Lisa and ceases to direct his resentment at her; he apparently now directs it at himself. "For the second time that day, Harry felt that he had somehow failed."

Now, why was Lisa's sentence a "stupid" one? Why didn't it obey Harry's rule? Because the nouns Harry had used were all overlapping (genus-species) terms, like model airplanes and toys, or like cucumbers and vegetables, whereas hers were non-overlapping kinds (eagles and lions). So she was forced to use the quantifier "no" while he had no problem using "all." But perhaps Harry has conveniently forgotten that when he offered Lisa some examples of pairs of terms, the first pair was "dogs and cats." Being non-overlapping natural kinds, these would have worked the same way as Lisa's sentence did; they would have required the quantifier "no." We do not know whether Harry realizes that he himself may have led Lisa astray. Perhaps this is why he couldn't finish the sentence, "It worked before..."

The point is that Harry, quite overtly and explicitly, proceeds to excuse Lisa from blame and, thereby, he himself **pronounces his resentment of her inappropriate**. His reason is that the rule should have worked on "stupid sentences." He had offered her the very counter-example she needed to show the limitations of his rule.

c. The moment of happiness

After the incident with Mrs. Olson, Harry's mother reproves him, but he can tell from her facial expression that she's pleased with what he said. So he has some milk "feeling happier than he had felt in days."

Maybe Harry is proud of himself for having successfully applied his rule to a particular case. Maybe he's especially pleased to have been able to disclose the bias that underlay Mrs. Olson's thinking. We aren't told anything about either of these possibilities. All we're told is that (1) his mother was pleased and that (2) he was happy. Should we conclude that the first was the cause of the second, or would this be a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy?

We should probably not ignore the likelihood that Harry's happiness had a good deal to do with

his feeling that he had been vindicated by the Olson episode. This is the joy of confirmation Schefler talks about when he speaks in praise of cognitive emotions.

But there is more to it than that if we want to risk the *post hoc* fallacy. Harry might feel happy because he made his mother happy, and if Harry Stack Sullivan's definition is to be accepted, he loves her because her happiness means as much to him, in this instance at any rate, as his own. We have to distinguish an autonomous happiness—an epiphany that might have been unrelated to other people—with a shared and mutually conditioned happiness such as Sullivan talks about. One gets the impression that Harry and his mother care about each other, and that the joy they share is an expression of their mutual caring. What is more, one gets the impression that she feels his happiness is justified, and he feels hers is too. Perhaps this has something to tell us about the nature of caring thinking. In any event, one is left with the idea that **Harry's moment of happiness is justified.**

Consider the analogy with critical thinking. Critical thinkers seek truth, and seek to reach it through valid procedures. (Indeed, it is sometimes said that truth is whatever valid procedures ultimately reach.) But the point here is that for critical thinkers, **truth** is the substantive regulative idea and **validity** is the methodological regulative idea.

The analogy with caring thinking is that appropriateness is to caring thinking what validity is to critical thinking. And in mutual, reciprocal caring, each has reason to feel that the other's caring is justified by being appropriate.

But what about the substantive aspect of the analogy? If truth is the substantive regulative idea for critical thinkers, what is the substantive regulative idea for caring thinkers? Here, Harry's experience can be helpful for it suggests that, ultimately, what the caring thinker wants is a warranted happiness, and so happiness would be the substantive portion of such a goal.

At once, two words of caution are in order. The first is that happiness is often used as a generic category for all positive emotions, whether they involve attending to others or being attended to by others. Being pleased is an instance of happiness, but so is being compassionate. Being ecstatic is an instance of happiness, but so is being considerate.

Secondly, the warrant for one's own happiness must always be seen in the context of the achieved

and warranted happiness of others, for it may be questioned to what extent one deserves to be happy in a world in which no large proportion of those who can be said to deserve happiness have achieved it and no large proportion of those who have achieved it can be said to deserve it.

DOES HARRY ILLUSTRATE HIGHER-ORDER THINKING?

The criteria of higher-order thinking require that it be creative, critical and caring. Does Harry's thinking in Chapter One meet these criteria?

(a) Creative thinking. Harry's most salient inventiveness emerges when it occurs to him that "sentences can't be turned around"—meaning that we cannot be sure that a true universal affirmative sentence will remain true when its terms are reversed. Harry's mistake was to have assumed that, since "all planets are things that revolve around the sun" is true, "all things that revolve about the sun are planets" must also be true. Harry's conversion rule prevents that illegitimate inference.

But Harry's rule prevents another mistake; the one made by the class. They had assumed that, since "all planets are things that revolve around the sun" is true, "all comets revolve about the sun" couldn't also be true. Harry's rule will also prevent that mistake. It will alert us to the possibility that there may be things that revolve about the sun that are not planets.

If Mr. Bradley had wanted to be more clear, he should have told the class that not all things that revolve about the sun are planets. As it was, the class came to the right conclusion (that comets were not planets) for the wrong reason (they thought Mr. Bradley had already noted that planets could not be things with tails).

Harry's rule has a claim to being the first important formal rule in the development of logic. Out of it, Aristotle will spin the syllogism, and out of it will come the bi-conditional, so significant for definitional and scientific theories.

The meaning of Harry's idea is, thus, to be found in its logical and scientific consequences, which is just where Pierce predicted it could be found. But the important correlation for us in all this is the relationship between **creativity** and **meaning**. About this, however, at this point let us say no more.

(b) **Critical thinking.** Harry's intellectual procedure ratifies these criteria of critical thinking:

- (1) It facilitates judgment by making it possible to draw valid inferences in cases of logical conversion.
- (2) It recognizes and utilizes the criteria of **truth** and **validity** (where validity is expressed as "following from" or "necessarily following from.")
- (3) It displays the process of self-correction, as Lisa is able to correct Harry's thinking, and together they integrate the result into a more comprehensive account.
- (4) Harry's thinking is appropriate to the encounter with Mrs. Olson. He does not directly challenge her values but attempts to show her that she has erred in her reasoning, which is a more objective plane on which to operate.
- (5) It can be added that, as shown in *Philosophical Inquiry*, p. 4, Harry's thinking embodies a paradigm of inquiry (in this case, the Pierce-Dewey paradigm), which should *ipso facto* make it a case of practically-applied thought or critical thinking.

(c) **Caring thinking.** To count, to be of importance, to matter—to be any of these is to have value. To value what has value is to care. Of course, some people care about what lacks value and other people fail to care about what possesses it. A reasonable person is, among other things, one who **appropriately** values what has value.

We respond to values by having feelings or by expressing emotions. One's affective life is the barometer of one's valuational atmosphere—or of what one takes to be that atmosphere.

Having feelings and emotions is not the only way in which one responds when dealing with matters of importance. One may equally well respond by means of actions — we may "act out"; one may respond, too, by appreciating; and one may respond by attempting to figure out, on the basis of what one knows **is** the case, what **ought to be** the case. Since all of these responses are ways of thinking, of which **caring thinking** is the genus, we may speak of affective thinking, active thinking, appreciative thinking and normative thinking.

Some considerations need to be taken into account at this point:

- (1) It will be noted that appreciation, usually yoked together with creativity under the

general rubric of aesthetics, is here removed to the category of caring thinking, on the ground that it is not a conspicuously creative form of mention. It is ore closely allied with cherishing, enjoying, relishing, fostering, holding dear and loving.

- (2) Although valuing remain closely allied, evaluation should properly be considered a matter of **critical thinking**, even when dealing with aesthetic matters.
- (3) Critical, creative and caring are not three different categories of thinking, but three different criteria that higher-order thinking must move towards. And yet, any particular act of thinking will satisfy each criterion, at least, to some extent. A critical review of a book will, itself, be appreciative and well-formed; a work of architecture will be well-reasoned and considerate in its impact upon the environment; and a moral act will be reasonable and will possess its own integrity or validity.

THE DISCOVERY OF EMOTIONAL JUSTIFICATION

Since moral judgments point ahead to actions and since emotions point ahead to actions, is it correct to conclude that emotions are judgments? Such an inference is, of course, logically invalid, but this does not rule out the possibility that emotions are judgments on other grounds. They may function so similarly in certain regards that it would be difficult not to classify them together. One such regard has to do with the present topic of moral education. Since both judgments and emotions lead to action (in many instances, at any rate), modifying them could lead to modifying the actions that flow from them. They, therefore, may be similar to the extent that they function similarly and we treat them similarly.

We treat them similarly in the sense that we look for their justifications by looking for the adequacy of their reasons in the light of their contexts. This is moral education in the sense that if students could perceive for themselves the inappropriateness of their judgements and their emotions, they might be less ready to act in the ways those judgments of emotions called for.

Ronald de Sousa writes,

Emotions ask the questions which judgment answers with beliefs... Emotions can be said to be judgments rather in the way that scientific

*paradigms might be said to be 'judgments'; they are what we see the world 'in terms of'.*¹

De Sousa also says that “an emotion is appropriate, if and only if the evoking object or situation **warrants** the emotion.³ And, along the same lines, Donald Davidson offers us a “principle of continence”: “Let your emotions be appropriate to the widest possible range of available scenarios.”⁴

Another sense in which emotions can be considered occasions of thinking is that in which the emotion in question specifically **evokes** our reasonableness. We would have no hesitation in saying that an emotion which calls forth a great variety of irrational actions must be an irrational emotion; why should we then hesitate to say that an emotion that stimulates reasonable consequences is a reasonable emotion? Thus, Laurance Blum remarks:

*Because compassion involves an active and objective interest in another person's welfare, it is characteristically a spur to a deeper understanding of a situation than rationality alone could endure. A person who is compassionate by character is, in principle, committed to as rational and as intelligent a course of action as possible.*⁵

Of course, if we were to stick to narrowly empiricist grounds, we could not classify something by the characteristics of its effects. We would have to say that caring, for example, is thinking only because its characteristics match the essential characteristics of thinking. But this is the merit of being able to move to the freer atmosphere of pragmatic theory, in accordance with which the meaning of a concept is revealed by the characteristics of its practical applications. Caring is as caring does.

It is important, however, notes Roger Scruton, to be able to show a person that what is appropriately felt on one occasion is appropriately felt on like occasions:

*Having shown a man what is contemptible in one instance of cowardice, and having brought him to feel contempt toward it, one will necessarily have brought him to feel contempt on like occasions. In educating such emotions one is educating a man's values, and providing him with a sense of what is appropriate, not just here and now, but universally.*⁶

Aristotle is clearly not the only philosopher, says Scruton, who has thought that the important thing if one is to lead a fulfilled and proper life is to feel the right emotion, on the right occasion, toward the right object and in the right degree.⁷ One of the reasons Scruton cites for the intense efficacy of utilizing the emotions for purposes of moral education is that, while they are connected to one's actions on the one hand, they are also intimately connected to one's sense and conception of oneself on the other.⁸

Of course, judgments are also connected intimately with one's self, but in a different way. A judgment is a miniscule version of the self as a whole. It represents a gathering together of the various strands of the self so that they can each be represented in the ensuing utterance, much as each Leibnizean monad represents the world at large from a single point of view. But an emotion, while connected to the self, does not represent it as a whole; it represents only one facet of it, although this is not to deny that the facet may be a dominant one. Thus, a normally temperate person may be so overwhelmed by anger that we say he is “beside himself.” And so he is. But a normally irascible person may give way to an explosion of ire which sums him up completely.

It seems hardly necessary to add, in closing, that the education of the emotions should invoke, as criteria, both the **appropriateness** that is specific to that particular variety of education and the **reasonableness** that is characteristic of all educational excellence. This is because appropriateness has to take into account the particular context in which the emotion is to occur, and as we know, there are countless such contexts. Here is where pluralism has to be acknowledged as a powerful fact or given.⁹ On the other hand, there are universal characteristics which all moral contexts have in common, and it is these that reasonableness attempts to do justice to.

We are so accustomed to seeing children who are virtually newborn laugh and cry that we infer that it comes equally natural to them to know on which occasions it is appropriate and reasonable for them to laugh, cry and express other of their feelings. But this is surely not the case. They have to **learn** which situations call for which emotions. They have to **learn** under which circumstances fear or pride or joy are proper and under which they are not. A well-constructed curriculum and pedagogy will seek to bring to expression those emotions that are appropriate but might normally

be repressed, just as it will seek to inhibit those emotions that encourage self-destructive and other-destructive actions. The education of the emotions is not emotionally repressive; it is emotionally redistributive.

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.
4. Donald Davidson, "How is weakness of the will possible?" in J. Feinberg, (Ed.), *Moral Concepts* (London: Oxford U. Press, 1969).
5. Laurance Blum, "Compassion" in Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. 516.
6. Roger Scruton, "Emotion, practical knowledge and common culture," in Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. 526.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 522-523.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 526.
9. It would have been enormously useful to have read, before writing this paper, John Deigh's superb survey article, "Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions," *Ethics*, Vol. 104, No. 4, July 1994, pp. 824-854.

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