

The Emotional Virtues

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Introduction

Emotion and *virtue* do not seem a likely pairing of concepts for political theory. Until recent years, neither of these terms on its own was a topic of close inquiry – in comparison to the attention devoted to such concepts as justice, power, interests and rights. Political theorists have been reluctant to examine seemingly personal traits and individual experience, preferring to focus upon social relationships and institutional practices. The concept of virtue is met with reluctance, as if one is treading upon ground too soft to support a stable framework of intellectual inquiry. The same has been true in other disciplines. In a work bravely devoted to the topic, philosopher Philippa Foot (1978, 177) admits to

a certain discomfort that one may feel when discussing virtues. It is not easy to put one's finger on what is wrong, but it has something to do with a disparity between the moral ideals that may seem to be implied in or talk about the virtues, and the moral judgements that we actually make.

To compound this discomfort, 'emotional virtue' seems to be an oxymoron or a contradiction in terms. The emotions have generally been understood in moral and philosophical discourse as a 'problem' rather than an integral and enabling feature of a good and enriching individual and social life. The general tendency has been to associate the emotions with a moral failing, a surrender, or indeed a passionate detour into vice. Hence moral inquiry has tended to emphasise the psychologically disintegrating and socially malign effects of negative emotions. In ethical analysis the emotions are, for epistemological reasons, relegated as a distraction or an irrelevancy, with the focus directed to the act and its consequences rather than the complex psychological aspects of agency or personhood. In any case, in recent years theorists have been far keener, perhaps for professional reasons (to win the interests

of students and the acceptance of publishers) to write about perversity, moral transgression, hatred, terror and violence. These are far more 'interesting' topics, surely, than the tame redoubts of felicity, fidelity, prudence and charity – to say nothing of chastity, which political theorists are not likely to do.

Defining Emotion

The meaning of emotion (*animi motus* in the Latin) is expressed in the term itself, that is, the idea of 'motion' in one's inward feelings and self-consciousness. These inward motions of the 'soul' (*psyche*) signal and give rise to 'moods,' inner *feelings* and *dispositions*. This *self-awareness* of the embodied psyche is a matter of *feelings* not *thoughts*: not facts or probabilities but the inward feeling, the emotional sense of ourselves *to ourselves* and of our presentation to others. (Elster, 1999, 244-50; Goffman, 1956, 1959; Harré & Parrott, 1996, 39-56).

The severally identified emotions designate how we sense our feelings, how we express them and how we are disposed to act in the face of events, things (including our own actions and bodily self-presentations) and other people.¹ Note the important distinction between our *disposition* and any subsequent *action*, such as contrition, flight or aggression. We experience and display outward signs of the inner feeling, as in shame, fear or anger, through familiar and empirically observed phenomena. Altered posture, changes in respiration and blood pressure, flushing or pallor, tears and muscular reactions in the face, eyes, hands and arms are

¹ Nussbaum (2004,23-24) asserts on behalf of 'the major emotions' that 'there is a large measure of agreement about what the category includes' in both the Western and non-Western traditions, and offers a rough and ready list drawn from the 'philosophical tradition and in related popular and literary thought ... joy, grief, fear, anger, hatred, pity or compassion, envy, jealousy, hope, guilt, gratitude, shame, disgust and love.' She notes the importance of distinguishing the emotions from 'bodily appetites such as hunger and thirst, and also from objectless moods, such as irritation and certain types of depression.'. My reading of the modern specialist psychological and philosophical literature – e.g. Elster (1999), Wollheim (1999), Solomon (1983) and Griffiths (1997) – suggests that the emotions, while undeniably real and distinct from other psycho-behavioural phenomena, have generally defied consistent, systematic classification, a difficulty that makes them no less real and, in the case of psychology, needful of analysis and at times clinical therapy.

some of the clinically documented emotional expressions. These inner motions may or may not, depending upon circumstances, lead to externalised motion, but they constitute the self-awareness and 'readiness' of what we call *predispositions*. Strong emotions may be expressed *outwardly* to presumed or actual observers and actors; *inwardly* (to the 'looking glass self'² in the case of negative emotions of humiliation, guilt and shame); or *generally* to groups or classes of things. They are the ready resources drawn upon across a range of 'rational' behaviour: to express delight at an infant's smile, to cry out in fear at approaching danger, to feel disgust in the presence of putrid waste.

Vices and the negative emotions have been the main interests for political theorists exploring these matters. Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* (1984), a work expanding on an earlier paper on hypocrisy and cruelty, was path-breaking as a serious analysis of deviations from the straight and narrow of justice and right reason. Martha Nussbaum has written widely on the emotions, including piety, fear, anger, mercy, love and desire. She plumbed the depths of the negative emotions in "'Secret Sewers of Vice': Disgust, Bodies and the Law" (Nussbaum 1999), and more extensively in *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Nussbaum, 2004), works which reflect the tendency to see the emotions as a dangerous problem and a threat to justice and the good life. However Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (1986) is a painstaking reassessment of the positive roles attributed to the emotions in ancient philosophy and psychology,

² This concept originated as a sociological concept describing self-consciousness, self-assessment and self-restraint in relation to our impression of how others see us (Cooley, 1922). Psychologists have applied this idea to emotional expression in which external experiences are registered internally. A classic example is the distinction between shame or embarrassment, which is expressed externally (by blushing and submissive or deferential behaviour), whereas guilt is experienced and expressed inwardly, as if 'looking at myself in the mirror.'

particularly with regard to the formation of good character and the motivation of ethical action in the thought of Plato and Aristotle.³

Why 'virtue' and not 'vice'?

When political and social theorists, as well as sociologists and psychologists, venture onto emotional terrain they tend to explore the affiliation of negative emotions (especially anger, fear and hatred) with vice, emphasising the immoral, vicious and criminal implications of the passions.⁴ The strong, unruly emotions of anger and envy clearly correspond to the vices of cruelty and avarice, just as love is closely associated with hate. These linkages have been decisively condemned as sin, crime (including an entire category: *crimes passionels*) or other forms of moral opprobrium (pride, greed, lust and gluttony *inter alia*). For example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997) insists that sinful acts are engendered by 'perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil,'⁵ and the believer is asked to acknowledge that 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...' (*Jeremiah 17:9*).

One need not deny the vicious *potential* of the emotions – when the rational mind does not 'govern' the heart's pulsating bodily appetites – in order to affirm emotion's virtuous potential. There is good reason to believe that the needs, appetites and desires of the whole body – as they are felt, canalised and expressed through the

³ *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Nussbaum, 2001) explores the emotions in modern philosophy and psychology as well as in the turbulent themes of romantic love in modern music and literature. Interestingly, its index has numerous references to anger, fear, grief, hatred and shame; none for intelligence or virtue.

⁴ This literature is discussed in Corcoran (2001, 2003).

⁵ The *Catechism* identifies the 'principal passions' as 'love and hatred, desire and fear, joy, sadness and anger' (§1772). The 'capital sins' are vices that are linked or opposed to the Cardinal Virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance (§§1805-09). The vices Capital Vices are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth or acedia' (§1866).

emotions – animate and sustain virtuous action, or what Aristotle calls acts ‘worthy of praise.’⁶

This proposition, I believe, can be advanced even with regard to the classical virtues of *wisdom, courage, temperance* and *justice*. *Thymos*, the font of emotion, is for Plato the ‘spirited’ element equally present in the soul, the body and the state. It provides *energia, orexis*⁷ (a ‘reaching out,’ ‘stretching to,’ wanting or grasping inherent in all animal movement) and resistance for the whole of life. It is a force not simply governed, tempered or repressed (as the appetites may require), but is the vehicle, the *means* of action by which the soul’s wisdom and ruling principles are given effect. Thus courage is, among the cardinal virtues,⁸ primarily an emotional disposition: an ‘excellence’ that is driven by passionate regard for one’s comrades and fellow-citizens in the face of danger.⁹ In the heat and dust of battle, the courageous soldier must ‘keep his head.’ He must neither flee in cowardly retreat or foolhardily expose his own life and the lives of his battalion to destruction. But clearly the courageous soldier’s pulse races and his senses are heightened for endurance and explosive action. His comradely awareness is palpable. Such a soldier is neither insane (‘off his head’) nor a robotic ‘killing machine.’

⁶ Philosophical and psychological studies agree that emotions are clearly distinguishable from instinctual and appetitive forces: Nussbaum (1986, 2004), de Sousa (1987), Stocker (1996).

⁷ Nussbaum, (1986, 273-76) discusses Aristotle’s original use of *orexis* as a unifying concept to explain ‘animal action’ in rational as well as non-rational forms of ‘response’ to the external world.

⁸ *Cardinal* derives from the Latin: both the ‘hinge’ (*cardo*) upon which all else hangs, thus of foremost, principal or paramount importance.

⁹ Noting the soldier’s passionate courage does not deny nor diminish the statesman and general’s excellence of wisdom. Their knowledge and capacity for abstraction are critical in determining the necessity of attack, timing, weaponry, likelihood of victory and alternative strategies of engagement. Yet even this wisdom is difficult to conceive in the absence of a range of emotional dispositions: the ‘inspired’ sense of honour and courage, the warmth of patriotism against a common enemy.

The emotional substance of the moral virtues is even more pronounced. This is true of the virtues of practical ethical action analysed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as the seven primary virtues of Christian theology.¹⁰

In both the Aristotelian and Christian ethical systems, the moral virtues are said to arise from careful formation, the emulation of excellent models, balance, moderation and practice. What this envisions is not the simple model of a rational head governing the implacable body. Rather, it describes the gradual habituation¹¹ of a person's growth, self-regulation and experience in developing the skills (the *arētai*) appropriate to a well-lived and happy life. This is not to suggest that bodily restraint and the conquest of passion constitute the principal idea Aristotle had in mind, much less Christian theologians (for whom it was certainly not). Indeed, this was not even the case for the Epicureans, for whom bodily feelings were indicative of the principal goods of life. Nevertheless, even for the Epicureans, for whom rational principles were necessary and decisive, *apathēia*¹² was preferable to the more active and turbulent passions.

Each of these ancient ethical system presupposes the ability to acquire a 'feel' for what is good, true, excellent and healthy, as well as the capacity to exercise these abilities freely and in conformity to self- and communal esteem. What intuitively guides, encourages, sustains and reinforces virtuous behaviour is not the forceful reins of the rational faculty or the supervision of our lives by an intellectual

¹⁰ The particular distinctions between Plato's divisions of *arete*, Aristotle's *dianoetic* and moral *ethike*, and Christianity's cardinal (prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude) and capital virtues (humility, generosity, love, kindness, chastity, faith, zeal; all in turn opposed to the 'seven deadly sins') need not dictate the present discussion. The modes of classification are never entirely straightforward. For example, Aquinas seems to confuse the matter: 'those virtues which imply rectitude of the appetite are called principal [cardinal] virtues.' *Summa theologica*, I-II, Q. 61, Art. 1.

¹¹ Aristotle's word for this formation – "ἕξις (*hexis*) – suggests how the moral virtues are formed not by a self-conscious rational will but by gradual, sub-conscious habituation.

¹² More specifically, not simply a 'lack of feeling' but *aponia* (lack of pain), *ataraxia* (imperturbability) and *katastematikos* (tranquil).

monitoring of active consciousness or external authority. Rather, the virtues are *practiced because* they give expression to our feelings (of fairness, honesty, generosity, well-being) and desires (for praise, solidarity with our fellows, pleasure in shared kindness, affection and esteem). We tend to say that we know these things *in our heart*. They are our *heart's desire*.

Clearly, then, the contradiction and supposed dichotomy between the mind and the body, and the mind's moral sovereignty over the flesh, is not the full story. Even in the Platonic and Christian combat between spirit and the flesh, virtue's necessary triumph over the body's demonic slavery is not necessarily passionless.¹³ Ancient tribute, both in philosophy and religion, is paid to the heart: its wisdom, truth, ingenuity, honesty, fairness and steadfastness. Similar tribute is paid to the senses in ordinary discourse in such phrases as 'it just feels right,' or the expression that one 'just felt that this was the right thing to do.' Such a feeling does not derive logically from a principle of reason, nor is it motivated (that is, 'moved') by factual information. It is, rather, quite possibly the opposite. We tend to say: on the spur of the moment, the courage to act 'came from within.'

The argument I make here, then, suggests that the virtues are *embodied actions*. They are not (only, or always) actions informed by precepts of reason or motivated by logical inferences. Rather, I am suggesting that the emotional 'content' of human action is not inchoate, destructive or inimical to the content of rational activity. Rather, a person's inward feelings, dispositions and outward expressions – the 'motions' experienced inwardly and expressed by physiological signs and motor

¹³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complexity of how virtue, and in particular, the intellectual virtues, were conceived and given virtual representation in art from ancient Greece through the early modern period. Suffice it to say that Wisdom, Temperance and Justice, as well as personifications of Theory and War, were typically rendered in female form.

actions – are themselves components and dynamic resources of what is good, right and praiseworthy to do. The inner promptings of emotions incline us to do things which, on rational or utilitarian calculations, may be risky or sacrificial, and enable us to keep doing them, nobly, even heroically, until it is sacrifice indeed. The head and the heart are not at war; they are not from different planets. And it follows that virtues are not the trophies of reason's conquest over emotion.¹⁴

The Standard Account

In arguing for the importance – indeed, the very *existence* – of emotional virtues it is appropriate to recall that, from a traditional perspective, the idea of pairing virtue and emotion is a psychological, philosophical and moral contradiction. The prejudice, if I may call it that, against an emotional dimension in virtue is not simply an oversight. Also at work are conceptual obstacles and misunderstandings in several academic disciplines – in particular philosophy, political theory and, more particularly, feminist theory – that have obscured the importance and prominence of 'the passions' in the Western philosophical and moral tradition.¹⁵ To make short work of what I take to be familiar theoretical territory, I will offer a number of fairly sweeping generalisations about the way in which the philosophical tradition has conceptualised emotion (or 'passion') and virtue. By doing so, I reproduce an interpretation – an elaborately dichotomous Standard Account – that James (1997) has, I believe, rightly undermined. I paint it here with broad brushstrokes for the

¹⁴ A frequent theme in ancient and Renaissance art effectively reverses that image, casting Virtue as the militant figure of noble action: 'Virtue Conquering Fortune' (or *Occasio*).

¹⁵ I owe this large and perhaps controversial proposition to Susan James's excellent book, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (1997). Its eye-opening scholarship sets forth extensive evidence of the central role of the passions in the Western religious and philosophical tradition, and consistently so from the ancient Greeks. James especially illustrates how the central role of the passions in seventeenth-century philosophy gave way to a reception and re-interpretation of seventeenth-century philosophy bedevilled by a dualistic 'mind-body problem.' James suggests that this is 'partly due to the influence of Hume and other Enlightenment thinkers, who represented the seventeenth century as an era dominated by dogmatic, religious values in which a proper appreciation of sentiment was suppressed' (15). Works that have addressed these matters from other perspectives include Solomon (1983, 1995) and Wollheim (1999).

rhetorical purpose of illustrating the easy familiarity of this orthodoxy. Readers variously informed will note exceptions to, as well as weaknesses of, various simplifications and strained stereotypes.¹⁶ For example, there were interesting cases of medieval and early modern Christian mystics burned at the stake for their insistence upon the passionate and deeply embodied spiritual union with the Divine.

Thus: virtue and emotion have generally been conceptualised as residing on opposing sides of a dichotomy separating the mind and body, a dichotomy presupposed in their 'structural' elements in psychology and physiology as well as in their behavioural and moral effects. This has been the case since Socrates and Plato established the priority and necessity of the intellectual governance of the individual soul – the rule of reason – over the unruly spirits and appetites of the natural body and the body politic. Intellectual, epistemological and moral implications flow from that *opposition*, an advised term freighted with meanings not captured by averring that the mind and body are simply *separate* or *distinct*. The relationship, already dramatically explicated by Plato in the *Crito* and *Euthyphro*, was subsequently clarified and indeed institutionalised as it resounded through the long tradition of pagan Hellenism (both Stoicism and Epicureanism), Christian scholasticism, and continuing into Enlightenment rationalism.

In this view the body's potency (*potentia*, power) was relentless, dangerous, threatening, sinful and recalcitrant. Such a force called out (from mind's intellect, the

¹⁶ James (1997, 17-20) describes in some detail how 'artfully constructed' oppositions, dualisms and dichotomies in relation to mind and body, reason and feeling, have been strategically effective, particularly in feminist theory,' but this comes at the cost of interpretations that falsify the philosophical tradition that is being 'demonized.' James argues that a careful study of what these early modern philosophers actually wrote about the central importance of the passions in human thought and reason serve 'to vindicate [the passions'] importance within early-modern philosophy.' 'By sharply splitting off reason from passion, [modern commentators on Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Pascal, Malebranche and Spinoza, *inter alia*] have generated a parodic interpretation of the processes by which knowledge is attained, and have obscured from view a fruitful conception of the emotional character of learning and the role of the passions in rational thought and action' (16-17).

logos of thought and speech) for the constraint, training, repression and conquest by the rational, divine, superior element that men (far more clearly than women) luckily possessed. Hence the simple but great predicaments, calling for great controls, of human life: mind over body, head over heart, reason over passion, thought over action.¹⁷ This was the divinely instituted, natural order of things when nature's hierarchy was copied into principles of custom, law, theology and morality by which human life was justly ordered and rightly lived.

Nevertheless, the Standard Account does coherently align the strongest and most visible threads of the Western philosophical and moral tradition, weaving the raw fabric which supported the embroidery of Western law, politics and moral conventions. For example, there was an assumed coherence of reason and morality. Moral virtue was, in effect, the product of a robust, developed expression of a rational mind. The will, when it was virtuous and good, was so because it was the servant of reason.

The triumphant achievement of Christian scholasticism was to reconcile reason and faith. One might say this was a dangerous, *passionate* faith in supernatural things embraced in defiance of the poor powers of philosophy's reason.¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas boldly rescued the faculty of reason from its Augustinian relegation to its woeful status as a sin of prideful vanity. Aquinas's enlightened image – 'Christ is perfect

¹⁷ It is only fair to acknowledge two notable exceptions to this view. David Hume (1875, II, 195), despite pride in his own cool temper, recognised the great influence of passion on custom and habit: 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.' His contemporary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1973, 55), also famously observed, if with uncharacteristic moderation: 'Whatever moralists may hold, the human understanding is greatly indebted to the passions, which, it is universally allowed, are also much indebted to the understanding.'

¹⁸ *Credo, quia absurdum est*, widely misattributed to the early Christian theologian Tertullian (c. 160-220 CE), as well as to Augustine, is the purest expression of this idea. Tertullian did write: 'The Son of God died; it is credible because it is improbable. He was buried and rose again; this is certain because it is impossible' (*De carne Christi* 5.4). Discussed in Osborn (1997), Chapter 3.

Man'¹⁹ – is virtually the photographic positive of St. Augustine's dark medieval negative: human nature as an utterly depraved, sinful and fallen creature. Thus for Aquinas, human reason, in its highest expression in philosophy, can attain to a 'science of God' (i.e. theology).²⁰ Rational philosophy adds to mere faith and is needful in the Church's stewardship of the simple flock whose lives need the guidance of principles they could not discover or independently comprehend.²¹

Similarly, the Standard Account provided what seemed a reasonable understanding of the special differences and defects of women. Dating to Aristotle and seldom spelled out because it *was* the standard view, reason was the 'male principle,' while the body was the 'female principle.' This view accorded with all the associated concepts of nature's organization in hierarchies, the male's supposed superiority of strength and readiness to action, and the female's generative and maternal functions. Sometimes referred to as the 'one sex' theory of human nature (Gould, 1991; Laqueur, 1990), the male was the archetype: complete, strong, fully developed both in mind and body. The female was the associate or complement of the archetype: necessarily different, weaker in mind and body due to incomplete development, and by nature functional and subordinate.²²

This sense of differentiation drew upon a multifarious range of ideas and prejudices, from Homeric tales and Aristotelian anatomy to Judæo-Christian texts and practices, ancient law and customs, and the apparently 'universal' experience of all races and species. The ancient strands of the Standard Account, therefore, were

¹⁹ *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Roman Catechism, Fourth Article, 6.

²⁰ *Summa theologica* Part I, Qu. 1.5

²¹ Not a bad trick, and one of a rather greater and more enduring influence compared to more recent professors of philosophy at the University of Paris.

²² Carol Gilligan (1982, 2-7; 6-9; 73) note how this developmental archetype continues into the modern era, especially in Freudian psychoanalytical theory, but also in other powerful conceptual distinctions in morality and language use.

incorporated in Western philosophy's deduction that female reason, being naturally weaker and defective, placed women in an eccentric position with regard to morality and virtue. Their morality was inevitably stunted and flawed, making them needful of closer and life-long supervision by men. It was entirely to be expected that women would be recalcitrant, passionate, and have aims that, in the expression of these feelings, would inevitably be irrational and detrimental to the peace of the household and, by implication, of the body politic. Their passions, whether negative or positive, were powerful and often directed toward, and powerfully attractive to, men. It must therefore be assumed that such passions were dangerous and in need of careful governance. Not only might their wiles and intrigues subvert the rule of reason, their essential service to the peace, virtue, comfort and future of the state must be safely preserved.²³

Though their reason was defective and their morality suspect, it could not be denied that women, when well-governed, were capable of exhibiting manifest virtues that greatly enriched civilised life. Thus 'feminine virtues' were long associated with the Christian names given to girls. Only several are now interestingly archaic: Charity, Constance, Patience, Prudence, Felicity, Mercy, Chastity, Modesty, Faith, Hope and Joy. These were the praiseworthy moral virtues or excellences of habit that all might develop. They complemented what the ancient philosophers distinguished as the 'manly' (in the Latin, *virtü*) intellectual or 'cardinal' excellences. Wisdom, courage, fortitude and justice were understood to be expressed

²³ Again Rousseau (1973, 36-37) provides a tantalising variation on the Standard Account: 'Amiable and virtuous daughters of Geneva, it will always be the lot of your sex to govern ours. Happy are we, so long as your chaste influence, solely exercised within the limits of conjugal union, is exerted only for the glory of the State and the happiness of the public.... It is your task to perpetuate, by your insinuating influence and your innocent and amiable rule, a respect for the laws of the State, and harmony among the citizens.... Continue, therefore, always to be what you are, the chaste guardians of our morals, and the sweet security of our peace, exerting on every occasion the privileges of the heart and of nature, in the interests of duty and virtue.'

in educational attainments, resolve, public action and victorious strength,²⁴ while the female virtues suggested self-restraint, submission and renunciation, as well as the inclination to be compliant, pleasing and supportive of others.

Here we have a rather blurred mapping of the relations between the emotions and the virtues, with the territory traced and divided by gender. This gave, as it were, a sexual valence to rationality and passion.

It hardly needs mentioning today that these dichotomies (mind/body, reason/passion, public/private) have been greatly publicised, widely attacked and fairly well subdued in Western intellectual circles. The gendered presuppositions, together with their hierarchies and power relations, have been as widely discredited as Aristotle's understanding of biological reproduction and female anatomy. Similarly, rationality and the 'products' of reason have been vigorously 'deconstructed,' even if, as James (1997) has argued, the attacks have at times underwritten and adopted – in theories of 'difference' – the very methodological presuppositions and problems being attacked.

Yet it seems clear enough that theoretical inquiry in moral philosophy, as well as in wider political and moral discourse, does not consistently deviate from the conceptual parallel between reason ('the rational') and virtue as ('good and right action'). Even in contemporary public discourse, concepts of justice, the good life and virtue have survived independently of virtue's embarrassing etymology. Things are still deprecated or praised in sensual, passionate terms. Bad ideas and persons are hot-headed, weak, wet and soft. By contrast, 'rational' policies, choices and actions are praised as cool, strong, hard-headed and even 'muscular.'

²⁴ Even male temperance carried with it the connotation of overweening strength for self-control and self-regulation in the face of external or appetitive temptations.

Moral Virtues

What if we reverse the priority of the cardinal virtues and give pride of place to the moral virtues? Instead of focusing on what Aristotle called the *dianoetic* or intellectual virtues, I suggest a re-evaluation of the *moral virtues* (*aretai êthikai*).

These are the excellences of individual action acquired by experience and entrenched as habits. The moral virtues need not be understood as a domain of human action diametrically *opposed* to the intellectual nor in *denial* of the importance of the cardinal virtues as bearings of society's institutional framework. The moral virtues are simply valuable qualities of actions, laudably appraised, occurring in personal and social relationships. In the classical idiom, they are dispositions and behaviours contributing to 'the good and happy life.' These are the *emotional virtues* in the sense that they give active expression to an emotion supportive of a socially prized moral excellence (*arêtê*). Such virtues are expressive and responsive, the very opposite of what Stocker (1996, xix) describes as the 'invisibility' of emotion in cool, rational calculation, or the 'absence' of passion's conquest.²⁵

The importance of this revaluation is implicit in challenging the neatly dichotomous alignment of reason and feeling with virtue and vice. To focus upon *aretai êthikai* does not diminish or subvert the intellectual excellences. We still look for the cardinal virtues to be reflected in decisive and just policy making, for example, and hope for it to be epitomised in courageous and wise political leadership. Wistfully, we wish that leaders – for example Bill Clinton, with regard to

²⁵ The distinction I have in mind can be illustrated by a comparison. The Stoic will urge us to 'choke back our tears' to achieve calm, rational indifference and imperturbability (*ataraxia*) in the face of injury, loss or misfortune; whereas the exponent of emotional virtue will, in the identical circumstance, counsel us to show merciful tears, freely flowing, to express grief and share the sorrow of others. Rather than the 'womanish counsel' of Christian morality – charity, mercy, and humility – ridiculed by Roman patriots, this is an opening to what Dominic Stefanson's doctoral research has usefully pointed out as the readiness to tears common in Homeric heroes on the field of battle.

temperance – actually did exemplify them. Nevertheless, it is plain enough that our daily aspirations and appraisals adhere to quieter, less heroic virtues of *honesty, patience, prudence, modesty, generosity, charity, hopefulness, love, affection, kindness, loyalty* and *felicity*.²⁶

Do we gain anything by *refusing* to designate emotional dispositions and habits as ‘virtues’? Could we honestly *deny* that some persons and some acts exemplify these characteristics better than others?

For purposes of argument, I concede the intent of these rhetorical questions. Good deeds *are* in fact done. Some people *are* more likely than others to perform them. In such cases, our personal, familial, neighbourly, vocational and political relationships are enriched and improved. We extol and benefit from those who embody and enact these virtues, and we regret their absence. We easily recognise these virtues as the deeds of an excellent citizen, a person ‘good and true’ rather than a superhuman hero or a saint, although these terms are not uncommonly used to describe exemplary individuals.

Though we may take these things for granted, it remains for me to establish the emotional element of these virtues.

I lay to one side the Socratic challenge that it is *rational* – an inexorable intellectual imperative – to be honest, charitable and altruistic.²⁷ I believe a confirmation may be forthcoming to that proposition, but it is beside the point of my present argument.

²⁶ As this analysis advances beyond the scope of this paper, I will examine how virtues relate to the concepts of trust and social capital that have been developed by such social theorists and Robert Putnam (2000) and Francis Fukuyama (1995). I anticipate that the presuppositions, or at least implications, of their ideas are more strongly linked to rationalistic conceptions of calculation, negotiation and contract: what Habermas called ‘strategic rationality,’ even if these relations are enacted on an emotional foundation of identity, recognition and communal sensibility.

²⁷ The ‘Prisoners’ Dilemma’ is perhaps the most familiar example of the moral futility of rational choice theory.

Rather, I simply indicate that *'emotion' is the initiating, driving and sustaining force of the moral virtues*. An immediate implication of such an argument is to resist, and indeed bridge, the classic dichotomy which opposes reason and emotion. The venerable proposition that reason more perfectly rules when the emotions are subdued, it seems to me, is wrong. It misperceives the place of emotion in our moral choices and depreciates their force in our resolve to act accordingly. Propositions similar to these have been argued extensively in very recent years by intellectual historians, philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists and physiologists. This growing body of work is not yet large. Its wider impact is perhaps gradual because of the complexity and specialisation of the material in question, ranging across broadly based exegesis of philosophical texts, clinical and experimental psychology and scientific methodology.²⁸ The arguments presented here serve, admittedly, as evidence of the reluctance of political theory to acknowledge this influence and to overcome the longstanding resistance to acknowledging and re-examining the role of emotion and 'the passions' in thinking, knowing, judging and, especially, in political rule.²⁹

Conclusion

I have caricatured the Standard Account of the passions as the implacable, incorrigible, insatiable mob over whom Reason must compel its absolute empire. It must do this, purportedly, by a powerful force, the Rational Will, which emanates

²⁸ The works which I have drawn upon in forming these views are Griffiths (1997), James (1997), Stocker (1996), de Sousa (1987). I am aware of, but have not greatly relied on, the works of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1995, 1999, 2003). His works discuss the processes of brain function, thinking, feeling, body consciousness and emotions, endeavouring to reinterpret the views of cognition and consciousness developed by philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza. Damasio's works are usefully, and critically, reviewed in Hacking (2004).

²⁹ Even Nussbaum (2004), in whose work the emotions have been the central subjects, makes the burden of her later study a carefully forensic and 'rational' approach to the propriety of shame, fear, disgust and anger in law and legal procedure.

mysteriously from the intellect, and may or not be ultimately authorised by the Divine Will.

There have been important dissenters³⁰ from the Standard Account among political thinkers, but until recent decades such dissent gave little if any quarter either to the importance of the role of emotion or the virtues in developing their theories of what social life is or ought to be. I refer here, for example, to Jeremy Bentham and Utilitarianism, but also to materialists such as Hobbes more generally. For these thinkers, the empire to whose throne we are chained (the image is Bentham's own³¹) is governed by pleasure and pain. Bentham makes no secret of the fact that he scorns any idea of virtue and denies any coherent meaning to the emotions. They are, he feels, as nonsensical as the idea of natural rights.

There is a temptation to make a list of emotional virtues, simply for purposes of clarity, order and simplicity. The influence of Aristotle's example of logical classification is strong,³² responding not only to the desire for an orderly comprehension, but also arising from the critic's desire to find flaws in a system. I am not the first one to note that these desires are frustrated, or enhanced, in the face of so many classificatory schemes for the virtues. Indeed, the same point has been made about the emotions. In fact, it is not terribly important, except perhaps from an aesthetic standpoint, to have a definitive list and a sharp set of categories for the virtues. Neither virtues nor emotions are natural objects or created artefacts. They

³⁰ The rejection of stereotypical mind/body, reason/passion, male/female dichotomies has been comprehensively argued by several contemporary philosophers (de Sousa, Griffiths), physiologists (Panksepps) and neurophysiologists (Damasio). In certain respects their work has anticipated or rendered obsolescent epistemological arguments by some feminist political theorists.

³¹ Bentham (1823, 17).

³² Classification was an important feature of Aristotle's method, and the astonishing range of his application of this method established field of science from astronomy to zoology.

are not ideals corresponding to some acknowledged set of universal moral or metaphysical principles.

Given the understanding of both vices and virtues as types of socialised habituation, we should not be surprised that different cultures may foster distinctive identities and emphases with regard to what is excellent and praiseworthy.³³ Importantly, however, psychologists as well as physiologists have generally agreed that the human emotions, while also exhibiting some historical and cultural fluctuations, are remarkably stable and have even been described as universal (Griffiths, 1997, 55-64; Nussbaum, 2004, 23). Thus, on the hypothesis that there must be an intimate connection between the emotions and the moral virtues, it is unsurprising that attempts have been made to establish an inclusive classification of virtues. I have already mentioned and loosely relied upon Platonic and Aristotelian typologies of human excellence and the Roman Catholic's rather unstable but doctrinally useful Cardinal and Capital Virtues corresponding to the equally indeterminate Seven Deadly Sins.

None, of course, is entirely satisfying or convincing.

I raise these ambiguities not simply to justify an escape from producing yet another classification, but to point out that the specific virtues which certain writers or traditions valorise are a function of the *purpose* for which that collection is drawn together. That purpose may be the celebration of the ideals of a warrior state; an attempt, in support of religion, to identify counterexamples to sins and taboos; a

³³ For example, in the First Century Roman Empire, several emerging Christian virtues (mercy, forgiveness, patience and charity toward the odious and the enemy) were deemed to be unpatriotic, shameful cowardice and corrupting vices.

theory of political justice; or to define and identify 'other-regarding virtues' (McCullough, 2004).

In recent years, political thinkers and students of society more widely have begun to focus on interpersonal, moral and civic values. We read increasingly about the importance, and often the depletion, or absence, of trust, honesty, loyalty, intimacy, generosity, kindness, love, attachment – and simply the felicitous smile of recognition and humane respect for those we might care about rather than (as in other eras and places) shun as enemies. Political theorists, it seems to me, have tended to approach these things from the intellectual heights of justice, rights and the somewhat pallid platform of liberalism and pluralism. I think they have not got very far, possibly because they have charted all the territory as far as these concepts reach. So there remains an important challenge to think seriously about the emotions and the moral virtues that consolidate rather than divide. The task is to do this in a way that extends our intellectual framework, rather than seeming to abandon it.

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