

# emotion and imagination

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This is a *small* book developing ideas from recent papers. See the table of contents below. The central idea of this book is that we have an enormous range of emotions, in part because our flexible imaginations allow us emotions structured around multiple points of view. So it is a real question which emotions are best for us, and when. And since emotions with multiple points of view are central to moral life the question allows us to wonder which moral attitudes are harmful, perverse, or counterproductive. I return frequently to emotions of smugness, priggery, and hypocrisy, in part to highlight how emotions that are essential to our lives are neighbours of emotions that get in the way. One way of making the question manageable is to consider families of moral emotions and the ways in which we can slide into one of them when another would make more sense. I describe several such families and how their members differ from one another.

Here is the final section of the book, wrapping up several themes.

## end: a virtue of imagination

It is often hard to grasp the attitudes of well-meaning reasonable people. One reason is the enormous range of emotions people can have, when they imagine points of view and frame more basic emotions on them. So there is an imaginative skill, of imagining not just how things seem from others' points of view, but what points of view others are imagining and structuring their emotions around. Imagining others' emotional use of their imagination. It is an important virtue. Explaining why, in this final section, will bring together several themes that have threaded through the book: imagination, emotion, points of view, the variety of moral emotions, the closeness of admirable and disreputable moral emotions.

The idea is positive: there is a virtue we should cultivate. It complements two rather radical negative ideas that have emerged. The first is that there are no *emotions* of moral approval and disapproval, shorn of their components of anger, disgust, encouragement, admiration, and so on, shaped over the frame of imagined points of view. In arguing for this earlier -- towards the end of the section emotional learning in part III -- I focused on cases where a person experiences emotions that undermine their earlier disapproval, so that they no longer had respect or affection for its point of view. I argued that the disapproval would dissolve. But it would not dissolve if it had really been a simple unstructured emotion. The other is that less desirable moral emotions, notably those in the smug family, are inevitable consequences of the same processes that give us the memotions that make human social life possible. They are made of the same materials -- arrogance and self-respect have similar blueprints -- so that the question of which emotions we should encourage in one another can take some pretty subtle turns.

A person acts, moved by shame, approval, condemnation, or some other moral emotion. Another person tries to understand, and perhaps to anticipate the next action. But she knows that if *she* were acting from shame, approval, or condemnation she would do something very different. Perhaps what he calls shame is leading him to public confession rather than wanting to hide; perhaps what he calls condemnation is leading him to teasing rather than attack. One possibility the second person must face is that his shame, or his condemnation, are not hers. Perhaps they are different emotions with some family resemblance. Part of the evidence that a similar but different emotion was at work could be that she managed to imagine such an emotion and it fitted. But to get this evidence she would have to be able to do the imagining.

Imagining the other person's emotion here means imagining their imagination, and it is no different from other cases we have seen. The point now is that it is an important and sophisticated virtue, something we can gain from learning and encouraging. Call it the virtue of imaginative rebundling, because it requires us to

take the pieces from which our own moral emotions are constructed and rebundle them as an approximation to someone else's. It is different from the virtue of being able to see things from another person's point of view. It has an extra twist: it is being able to see things from a point of view that the other imagines, and then to follow through with a grasp of how this influences the other person's emotions. It is also different from the virtue of tolerating other people's differing moral opinions. Simple tolerance means taking what people approve, disapprove, admire, or condemn at face value, and living with the fact that these are not exactly your attitudes to the same things. Rebundling means something more subtle, since you have to get your head around how others have different attitudes, which could be mistaken for yours, to the same and to different objects.

This can happen with moral approval and disapproval, where for example one person's attitude to someone eating meat imagines sadness from the perspective of nature, another's imagines fury from the perspective of a giver of rules for human conduct, and a third's imagines indifference also from the perspective of a law-giver for humanity. It seems as if the first and second agree -- they both disapprove -- and both disagree with the third. But the first and the third may have more in common. Or for a rather different example consider the gulf between two people when one builds his self-respect on the imagined encouragement of powerful authority-figures and the other on imagined appreciation by the benevolent but pessimistic point of view of posterity. (From the first perspective the slogan is "be grand, never seem inferior", and from the second it is "don't fake it, never seem pretentious". But for both it is a matter of integrity.) So "arrogant bully" meets "ridiculous softie". They will take completely different funerals as honouring a deceased. Each may be puzzled "why do they need *that* for self-respect." But emotional unbundling would show them that they have different respects for different selves.

It's an anti-smug virtue. At any rate it tends against one kind of smugness, one that particularly preys on people -- like me! -- who suspect that other people's views about right and wrong are primitive and confused. We think "yes, she is of

the sincere opinion that that was a terrible thing to do, but her feeling of disapproval, well, it's just a mixture of the hostilities she thinks her mother would have and the disappointment she imagines that God would have, so there's no attempt to sense what an impartial reflective view of the situation would be." Perhaps there is no such attempt, and perhaps it would be better if our moral emotions did show such attempts: but that does not prevent the disapproval being a properly moral emotion, seeing a situation from a perspective of authority which might coordinate the actions of different people. Not to emotionally unbundle is not to see this, and is a smugness that people like the author of this book are particularly prone to. It is to confuse the question "is this a moral emotion?" with the question "is it desirable that this emotion be widespread?" Though imagination shapes emotion, it cannot tell us which emotions we would benefit from having.

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