
David Pugmire, *Sound Sentiments: Integrity in the Emotions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2005, 222 pp.

What is an emotion? In the domain of the philosophy of emotions, this is a frequently asked question. However, it has been seen that this question is not an easy one to answer. Most philosophical analyses have been (and remain) directed towards the cognitive aspect of emotions, while their psychological and, to some extent, behavioral and social dimensions have been somewhat pushed into the background. Yet certain philosophers have connected emotions with ethics: David Hume, for instance, thought that emotion was an essential part of ethics. David Pugmire, a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Southampton, explores both aspects of emotion, the cognitive and the ethical, in his book *Sound Sentiments*. He introduces us to this subject with the question: “What does it mean for emotion to be well-constituted? What distinguishes good feeling from (just) feeling good?” (p. 1). To answer these questions, we must refer to the notion of soundness. As the book’s title suggests, emotions can be sound; and in order to be sound, “emotions may need to be capable of genuineness, depth, and other kinds of integrity” (p. 1). Soundness is connected with truth, and whether we can trust an emotion depends on how sound it is. This book also explores the idea that emotions permit valuation by degrees of adequacy; in the author’s words: “The governing aim of this book is to show that, how and where there can be problems of a structural kind with the adequacy of emotions and the emotional life” (p. 2). Considerations of adequacy pertain to thought and desire. Practically all emotions can be expressed by behavior. Should we then think about behavioral tendencies, since they are essential for emotion? Psychology indicates that we should. Yet it also seems that emotion is thought, perception, awareness; it is not merely an expression, but an understanding of its being expressed. Pugmire claims that the criterion for the soundness of an emotion is *appropriateness*. If an emotion is not appropriate, it can lead to certain errors in the emotional life or lapses of integrity; and in this way emotion is related to virtue. Pugmire claims that integrity itself is the heart of soundness in emotion. Therefore, his book analyzes a variety of ways in which our emotions and emotional life can be well-formed. Some of these are qualities that emotions may have (e.g. depth), while others are attitudes with a characteristic emotional “filling” and effects (e.g. cynicism or sophistication); yet both are under the influence of culture. The main part of *Sound Sentiments* talks about properties that emotions can acquire: profundity, narcissism, sentimentality, cynicism, ambivalence and sophis-

tication. Pugmire examines all of these in detail, devoting one chapter of the book to each.

Let us now turn to the first – *profundity*. Pugmire claims that deep emotion is something more than an emotion which one feels deeply. In my view, this is the most important part of the book. The author attempts to justify the notion of emotional depth, suggesting in what sense emotions can be more or less “true”, and showing how their resonance may become corrupted by misleading social harmonies. Depth or profundity of emotion depends on the satisfaction of four conditions: real belief (its cognitive basis must be robust); form of depth (integration in a broader structure of experience and interest); truth (reality is in accordance with what the emotion seeks to make of it); and emotional strength. The third criterion (truth) is an externalist constraint, which Pugmire qualifies so as to allow that “emotional depth need not involve a true judgment just so long as it does not merely involve personal fantasy” (p. 51). The truth requirement means that emotional depth is not merely a psychological property of emotion. In specific cultural environments, emotional depth may be unattainable.

Chapter 3 discusses the function of emotion. Pugmire wonders if emotions “play any part in our *active* life” (p. 78). It would seem that they do, for emotions have a social influence, especially when they are expressed. Can we think of them as devices of manipulation, or strategies of a sort? Certainly we sometimes use them in this way. So perhaps emotions should be viewed instrumentally. However, Pugmire argues that this is unsatisfactory on both a practical and a theoretical level. Manipulative emotional responses can function only if we do not perceive them as such. If all of us were to act in this way, it would not function at all. Targeted emotions would have no depth, and emotions cannot be summoned or avoided merely at will. In any case, emotions are too unlike actions to be well formed when used strategically.

As we have seen earlier, emotions may be deep or shallow; more specifically, they may be narcissistic or sentimental. In these latter cases, emotions are not really concerned with an object but with ourselves, with our self-image, or the thrill of an experience itself. Many philosophers, Pugmire claims, think that emotion is a form of concern about things affecting one’s well-being. Emotion has a way of becoming extremely ego-centric; this happens when the emotion itself becomes quite important for a person, simply because it is his. Then the person’s concern becomes focused on the emotion, or even on himself. Although this is a common phenomenon, narcissistic emotion is pathological; *narcissism* is an emotional vice. Only a few emotions can be real emotions of concern with

oneself. To grant this form of concern to other emotions is isolating, and hostile to emotional depth. However, narcissism gives rise to a possibility that illustrates one of Pugmire's most interesting ideas. He suggests that narcissism could turn into virtue, given a certain sort of world. Our range of emotional capabilities is conditioned by our social context: "Society is as much a crucible of emotions as is personality. Perhaps in a given kind of world, only certain kinds of emotional life are likely or even possible" (p. 5).

In Chapter 5 Pugmire discusses *sentimentality* as one of the uses to which emotion may be put. He claims that sentimentality is often charged with subordinating truth to a desired emotional effect. There can be both good and bad reasons for doing this; in the latter case, the real importance of an object is subordinated to its emotional utility for the agent. Sentimentality is likewise an emotional vice, in that sentimental concern is narcissistic. The reason for this lies in the fact that what is important to us is not the object's actual significance, but rather its emotional impact on us. Pugmire regards this as some kind of indifference to the object itself, meaning that sentimentality is, in fact, cynical. And with that he introduces the notion of cynicism.

Cynicism is another form of emotional vice. It undermines emotional life and social connection; it affects our emotions in a negative way, for it is driven by disdain and pride; yet at the same time it is unemotional and cognitively stable. Pugmire says that cynicism is diametrically opposed to sentimentality: "It seems to be primarily a cognitive policy that is immune to emotional fallout" (p. 147). Cynicism can sometimes offer us comfort, but nonetheless it tends towards untruthfulness and an unreal interpretation of what happens in the world.

Pugmire discusses mixed emotions under the heading of *emotional ambivalence*. He describes situations in which two intense yet opposite emotions may be experienced at the same time. Such emotional ambivalence is very common, and there are nine ways in which it can occur: (i) a clash of different, incompatible feelings towards the same thing; (ii) the *serial model* – one's state of emotion is unstable, with contrary emotions about the same thing which are not simultaneous; rather, only one is active at a given time; (iii) the coexistence of incompatible emotions – these contrary emotions are layered, not sequenced; (iv) *dividedness of mind* – an ambivalent response, incompatible emotions without complete structural integrity, one emotion prevailing over another; (v) a convergence of dissonant emotions on the same thing at the same time; (vi) an attitude of ambivalence producing a confused response rather than a clear one – inconsistent thoughts canceling each other out; (vii) a conflict of

values – the importance of each value does not permit compromise with that attached to any other, ambivalent emotions cannot be consolidated; (viii) emotional polarization in favor of one act instead of another; and (ix) sublimation – some emotions change when they occur as aesthetic responses. An ambivalent emotion may be unstable in these ways, due to which it cannot easily achieve depth.

Since ambivalence is not the way to gain emotional depth, and yet cannot be avoided, we should at least try not to be confused by it. Pugmire suggests that “perhaps our reception of ambivalence needs to be sophisticated in its expectations” (p. 195). *Sophistication* is considered a virtue; sophisticated taste, for instance, is admired. Sophistication is actually a way of approaching problems, acquiring experience and dealing with conflict. It contrasts with spontaneity, placing its stress on complexity. Is it possible for an emotion to be sophisticated? What may be sophisticated about an emotion is not its content, but rather its background and history. Although sophistication may be a virtue in the emotional life, it is also emotionally hazardous by nature. The more complexly differentiated one’s perception is, the more it escapes the pragmatic terms in which any emotion is experienced. The refusal to stereotype or simplify things, attempting instead to see them for what they are in some less obvious sense, partakes of the truthfulness required for sound emotion. However, the idea that few things are what they seem makes it difficult to trust spontaneous emotional reactions. Sophistication can result in a condition of irony, where nothing is ever quite believed.

At the end of the book Pugmire briefly summarizes his main ideas, admitting that the discussion of what well-formed emotions require is still not complete. Even so, he offers many explanations and some new guidelines for further thought. In my view, his main contribution here is a detailed and comprehensive study of emotional profundity. Although one might voice some minor complaints (regarding his rather complex style of writing, which might be a problem for non-native English readers, or concerning his formulation of the externalist constraint), Pugmire has written an interesting and useful book.

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