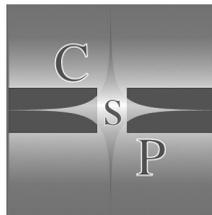


Religious Emotions

Religious Emotions:
Some Philosophical Explorations

Edited by

Willem Lemmens and Walter Van Herck



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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In memory of
Robert C. Solomon

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The editors also express their gratitude to Dr. Chris Gemerchack, who assisted them with care and intellectual devotion in preparing this collection for publication.

INTRODUCTION

MODERNITY AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

WILLEM LEMMENS & WALTER VAN HERCK

In recent decades contemporary Anglo-American philosophy has seen a boom in publications on the subject of ‘the emotions’. Robert C. Solomon’s book, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (1976), is generally considered the beginning of this more or less circumscribed debate. Solomon inaugurated what he and many after him welcomed as a real rehabilitation of the emotions. Authors like Ronald de Sousa, William Lyons, Patricia Greenspan, Robert Gordon and Harvey Green (to name but a few) followed in Solomon’s footsteps by elaborating theories of the emotions that challenged what he called ‘the myth of the passions’.¹ According to this myth, philosophers and theologians in particular had treated the emotions (or ‘passions’, as they were called until the dawn of the nineteenth century) as disturbing, anti-rational forces originating in the dark regions of body and mind. In opposing reason they were considered dangerous to the moral and spiritual health of the self and inimical to social life. Solomon and others claimed exactly the opposite. According to them the entire Platonic-Cartesian myth of reason as a necessary master of the passions rested upon ‘an error’ (as Damasio pointed out from a neurological perspective in his famous *Descartes’ Error*).² This error, which has been reinforced in our Western culture by the Christian religion and certain philosophical traditions (such as Stoicism), needed a radical revision.

Emotions, as Solomon *et al.* have made clear in various studies, are not blind, purely physiological and bodily-steered ‘gut reactions’. They do not necessarily oppose our volitions, beliefs and judgments. Rather, they co-constitute the intentional and cognitive relation of the mind to the world. Emotions are not necessarily antagonists of reason and understanding, but are rather their handmaidens, if not their actual guides. Without emotions we would not be able to judge the world and other people, evaluate

ourselves and others and make significant choices in life. Criticising the so-called *feeling* theory of the emotions—known as the James-Lange theory and often also ascribed to Descartes and Hume—Solomon and his heirs thus inaugurated the now widespread cognitivism in contemporary theory of the emotions. Today, it is widely accepted that emotions express evaluative perceptions or even judgments, that they have a history and that they mould and shape not only the beliefs, but also the character and life stories of human beings. Emotions, in short, constitute the character and identity of human beings and are an essential aspect of our mental life.

The rehabilitation of the emotions in contemporary philosophy is intriguing and asks for further reflection. Clearly it goes hand in hand with the parallel flourishing in ethics of the view that feeling and imagination play a crucial role in moral judgment. This view has been expressed by those influenced by the later Wittgenstein, and more recently by Iris Murdoch, John Casey, Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum.³ These and other moral philosophers shaped the profound critique of the one-sided rationalism dominant in mainstream moral theories until late last century. In Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy, the insight that reason, virtue and affectivity were necessarily interwoven aspects of a full moral life gained acceptance. Morality feeds on feeling and affect in addition to calculation and prudence; reason needs the heart not only to teach us about, but to assist us to actually live the good life.

It is not surprising then that after the first boom in theories of the emotions, various philosophers have studied the specific role and nature of moral emotions. Publications by authors like Justin Oakley, Michael Stocker, Simon Blackburn, Richard Wollheim, Peter Goldie and Martha Nussbaum confirmed the cognitivist theory of the emotions inaugurated by Solomon.⁴ In these books the existing debate on the emotions was enriched with the deeper analysis of the role of feeling and judgment in emotional experience, the relation of emotion to virtue and the relation between narrativity, emotions and moral vision. Remarkably, however, these studies remained silent about, or noted only in passing, the existence of so-called *religious* emotions.

This brings some interesting questions to the fore. First of all, why was the realm of religion so poorly treated by almost all major theorists of the emotions? Moreover, after closer consideration, does the ‘myth of the passions’ give an accurate picture of the alleged historical oblivion or repression of the emotions? Is this repression due to a Christian-inspired philosophy and theology, as most participants in the emotions debate at least implicitly acknowledge? If not, what could be a more adequate picture of the historical shifts and changes within the accounts and theories

of the emotions? Finally, could the answer to these questions teach us something conceptually about the nature and significance of these so-called *religious* emotions for human life?

The almost total negligence (until recently at least) of the relation between religion and emotions in contemporary philosophical theory of the emotions has historical roots. Our era is one of secularisation and individualism, which is the result of a long and complex process of transformation in Western culture since the eighteenth century. Hans Blumenberg has coined this transformation the *Umbesetzung* (reoccupation) of the self-understanding of modern man.⁵ It is through the sober cultivation of its own conditions of life and its sense of humanity, rather than through its relation to an absolute transcendence, that the modern self finds its moral destiny. This depreciation of the classical Platonic-Christian vision of human nature has dramatically changed the value-horizon of modern culture.

From the seventeenth century onwards, as Charles Taylor has also pointed out, the increasing appreciation of an ethics of 'ordinary life' seals a real retreat of the sacred.⁶ This results in a gradual shift in focus from 'God' to 'human nature' in the primary value systems of Western culture and society. Family life, individual well-being in work and leisure as well as commerce and sociability become the central goods in moral life. The revaluation of man's mundane, this-worldly condition leads further to the idea that a full *human* life necessarily requires the cultivation of passions and sentiments. Taylor masterfully pointed out in his *Sources of the Self* that in a first phase the emergence of the 'ethics of ordinary life' went hand in hand with a liberal Presbyterianism or deism, for example in the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson. In a later phase, however, this recognition of the value of ordinary life was integrated into a much more naturalistic, even anti-religious moral metaphysics, of which Hume is the most prominent spokesman.⁷ The revaluation of the passions and sentiments was, from then on, interwoven with a wholly secular, pagan moral value-horizon, exemplified by a scientific worldview. As we will see immediately, this transformation also leads to the coining of the term 'emotion' as a substitute for the concept of 'passion' in the nineteenth century. This completes in a certain sense the secularisation of modern moral anthropologies.

The 'ethics of ordinary life', which inaugurated the appreciation of passions and feelings and 'the retreat of the sacred' so typical for Modernity have clearly echoed through twentieth century theories of the emotions. Solomon's 'rehabilitation of the emotions', for example, is directly inspired by existentialism and Nietzschean romanticism—two

trends in contemporary thinking famous for their opposition, even hostility towards Christianity and its Platonic metaphysical theology. But also in Martha Nussbaum's recent *Upheavals of Thought*, the heritage of 'ordinary life' ethics is remarkable. Nussbaum defines her extreme cognitivist view of the emotions in terms of an actualised Aristotelian *eudaimonism*.⁸ In this *eudaimonism*, which is also shaped by the Neo-Stoic cognitivist theory of the emotions, she integrates a normative ideal of authenticity in a mundane and liberal ethics. Nussbaum's *eudaimonism* claims that emotions are evaluative judgments which relate the self to its 'own life plans, values and important projects'. As necessary ingredients of the affective life, emotions such as love and hate, compassion and grief, guilt and shame, are wholly committed to the 'dear self' and its this-worldly concerns: family-life, friendship, success in one's job and career, the development of one's personality, sexual flourishing. Nussbaum's breathtaking analysis culminates in the defence of love as a central emotion that should be educated and transformed into a simultaneously caring and benevolent attitude towards kin and humanity as a whole. Closely interwoven with compassion, this normative concept of love should be clearly distinguished from the transgressive love towards God or the Absolute Good, as historically expressed by Plato and Augustine.⁹

Nussbaum nevertheless recognises the existence of certain emotions (awe, wonder) which sit uneasily within her *eudaimonistic* scheme and have obviously a religious connotation. These emotions do not focus on the mundane self, but recognise as their intentional object a transcendent Good—God, the Absolute, the totality of Being, the existence of the universe *sub species aeternitatis*—that is absent, or at least foreign to a naturalised liberal *eudaimonism*. Nussbaum certainly recognises that love and compassion could possibly differ in significance against a religious 'value-horizon', which was a common perspective before the dawn of Modernity. She devotes, for instance, long analyses to the Augustinian Divine Love and to the highly rationalistic *Amor Intellectualis Dei* of Spinoza. As a normative ideal, however, she most explicitly rejects these accounts of love. Nussbaum seems convinced that categorising emotions such as awe and wonder, but also love, compassion, fear and guilt, from within a religious scheme of values would betray the liberal individualism and secularism taken for granted in contemporary theories of the emotions. It is as if this betrayal also ignores dramatically that the secularised worldview underpinning these theories is most in tune with human nature as such.¹⁰

This brings two further questions to the forefront: how accurate is in fact the 'myth of the passions' dominant in contemporary theories of the

emotions? Moreover, is the alleged negligence of the emotions in the Western intellectual culture due to a Christian-inspired philosophy and theology - as this myth defends?

The valuing of the passions and sentiments in the eighteenth-century ethics of ordinary life at least indicates that the historical details of this myth could be nuanced. The so-called rehabilitation of the emotions is not an invention of late twentieth-century philosophy and science, but occurred earlier in the history of Western thinking. The works just mentioned, from Shaftesbury to Hume, bear testimony to this. For these thinkers, but also for someone like Rousseau, it did not make sense to reduce man's affective life wholly to the stark opposition between emotion and cognition, or reason and passion. To be sure, passions were viewed as occasional outbreaks of disturbing, irrational forces originating in the dark regions of body and mind. However, on another level, passions or affects were considered by these and other eighteenth century moralists as signs of a higher sensibility, more particularly the capacity for aesthetic and ethical judgment, and as part of the character of the virtuous self. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the language of moral sentiments flourished precisely in eighteenth-century anthropology.

The existence of a rich affective vocabulary in eighteenth-century philosophy (with its distinction between *passions*, *affects*, *affections*, *feelings*, *sentiments*) leads to a further observation: the category of the 'emotions' is a recent invention. This is in any case the central thesis of Thomas Dixon's *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. In his well documented and convincing study Dixon points out the historical background of this conceptual invention. He turns Solomon's 'myth of the passions' on its head and requests a fundamental revision of the idea that the Christian theology and worldview as such radically oppose the emotions or dismiss them as evil.¹¹

As Dixon makes clear, the category of the 'emotions' became popular in English-speaking philosophy and science sometime between 1800 and 1850 through figures like Thomas Brown and Thomas Chalmers. Foreshadowed by Hume, these thinkers provided the impulse for a real secularisation of the study of the emotions, culminating in the first scientific treatment of the emotions with Charles Darwin and William James.¹² Here we see the *Umsetzung*, as mentioned by Blumenberg, mirrored in the history of science: the older categories of the 'passions' and 'affections', 'sentiment' and 'feeling' belonged to a discourse with roots in a religious worldview. The substitution of these terms with the concept of 'emotion', so Dixon argues, marks a transformation toward a new paradigm, which inaugurated a much more reductionist view of the

nature and dynamics of humankind's affective life. However, according to Dixon, this also means that the stark opposition of emotion and intellect, the schism between the affective and the cognitive aspects of human nature ascribed to the whole of Western culture and thought from Plato to the twentieth century, is incorrect. It is only through the reductionism of Darwin and James that this antagonistic account of the 'emotions' emerged.

Dixon also nuances the alleged hostility of Christian theology—and the Platonic metaphysics interwoven with it—towards the emotions: according to him, this aspect of the 'myth of the passions' is also fundamentally misleading. Certainly, orthodox theologians and Christian-inspired philosophers in the nineteenth century opposed the physicalist theories of the emotions, which became increasingly dominant in science and philosophy. They did so to preserve, so to speak, the non-reductionist anthropological views of Christian inspiration, which often leave space for the specific role of the affections and passions as constituents of a religious way of life.

Orthodox Christians like William Whewell and William Sewell, but also 'natural theologians' such as Sir Charles Bell and James McCosh, recognised the constitutive role of the higher affections or emotions for religious life during the nineteenth century. They thus prolonged a tradition with roots in the thought of Augustine and Thomas, but reworked from a typical eighteenth-century Christian anthropological perspective, with figures such as Isaac Watts, Jonathan Edwards and Friedrich Schleiermacher. In Catholicism, moreover, the constitutive role of affections and passions for Faith was also already acknowledged by figures like Cardinal Newman and René de Chateaubriand before the twentieth century. Newman, for example, remarks in his *Grammar of Assent*: "Conscience has an intimate bearing on our affections and emotions, leading us to reverence and awe, hope and fear . . ." ¹³ And in his *Génie du Christianisme*, Chateaubriand depicts, in his inimitable rhetoric, how Catholic Christianity is nothing less than a 'religion of passion': "la religion chrétienne est elle-même une sorte de passion qui a ses transports, ses ardeurs, ses soupirs, ses joies, ses larmes, ses amours du monde et du désert. . . . Comme toutes les grandes affections, elle a quelque chose de sérieux et de triste . . ." Beauty, towards which the Christian soul aims, so Chateaubriand further remarks, is eternal and Platonic in nature: it consists in the relation towards the Divine. "Pour arriver à la jouissance de cette beauté suprême," Chateaubriand adds, "les chrétiens prennent une autre route que les philosophes d'Athènes: ils restent dans ce monde afin de

multiplier les sacrifices, et de se rendre plus dignes, par une longue purification, de l'objet de leurs désirs."¹⁴

The increased awareness of the irreducible role of the passions and emotions in human life—as it became apparent in eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy and nineteenth-century proto-psychology—was thus clearly mirrored during that same era in the religious anthropologies of Christianity. One could add to this a further remark. No doubt, this positive appreciation of man's affective nature as constitutive of Faith and the religious way of life has its roots deep in the philosophical and theological traditions of Christianity (we have already mentioned Augustine and Thomas Aquinas). However, one cannot ignore that these traditions underwent important changes and transformations through the ages. There is, after all, a considerable difference in the concrete way in which, for example, a Church father in Augustine's day, a Dominican monk in thirteenth-century Italy or a Protestant believer in Jonathan Edwards' eighteenth-century America would each conceive of his affections towards God and the way he should bring these into tune with his will and the aspirations of his faith.¹⁵ Moreover, one should not ignore the broader metaphysical horizon of Christian anthropology with its dramatic conception of man's fallen nature, the need for redemption and grace and the life-long struggle to overcome sin. Chateaubriand's characterisation of the Christian religion reminds us of this fact: specific passions and emotions may be recognised as vehicles of Faith and salvation. Indeed, the longing for salvation is itself a form of passion. However, human nature is also, according to Christian anthropology, prey to lower forces and appetites which should be conquered and overcome by the will.

How central is this gloomy perspective on human nature for the religious person in general? Or does this perspective rather reflect a biased, pessimistic dismissal of human nature—specific for a certain type of Christian religiosity? Is such a biased preoccupation with human life not rightly criticised in liberal culture and, more specifically, in contemporary theories of the emotions? If so, speaking of 'the myth of the passions' may be misleading from an idea-historical perspective, but is nevertheless understandable from a more normative point of view. Contemporary theorists of emotions like Nussbaum and Blackburn should then perhaps be welcomed for their emancipatory zeal in propagating a positive, secular paganism which radically opposes the Christian conception of human nature with its excessive desires, cultivation of guilt and gloomy melancholy, but also its extreme joy and devotion, its longing for the eternal beyond measure.

It would take us too far to develop a meta-critique of the normative intentions underlying the dismissal (albeit implicit) of Christian anthropology by contemporary theories of the emotions. However, the historicity of Christianity and the need we may feel to create a genealogy of its so-called dark view on the human condition should not blind us to a deeper, more urgent question, at least from a philosophical and scientific point of view: how should *religious* man as such be considered? More precisely, how necessary and unavoidable is the realm of religion for the *conditio humana* irrespective of the specific tradition in which it manifests itself? This question is surely even more difficult to answer than the historical reconstruction and evaluation of Christian anthropology. However, this question is the central issue brought forward by the quest for a specific religious affectivity—or, in terms of this contribution, the nature and significance of ‘religious emotions’.

Do specific ‘religious emotions’ exist, and if so, what is their nature and significance? Does it make sense to coin this term to refer to a specific region of the affective life of humans? Can this region be distinguished from, for instance, the moral or aesthetic spheres? Specific moral and aesthetic emotions at least seem to exist. The delineation of their causal conditions, their specific phenomenology, and their relation to language, culture and social praxis have recently been explored extensively. But what about *religious* emotions?

One of the challenges for contemporary philosophical anthropology is, without doubt, to develop a conceptual analysis that does justice to this class of emotions. It may be the case, as Robert C. Roberts recently argued in his *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*, that the concept of the emotions is “fuzzy on the edges” and to a certain degree “indeterminate”.¹⁶ As Roberts also remarks however, one cannot ignore the presence in folk psychology of the category of the ‘emotions’. From this fact, philosophical analysis starts to delineate the conditions under which this category is used, with reference to different practices, language games and value systems that offer a conceptual grid to classify specific types of emotions, a sense of hierarchy between emotions, the components of emotions, and their phenomenological colour. Why should such an analysis not be extended to *religious* emotions? The study of Petri Jarveläinen—one of the few in contemporary theories of the emotions devoted specifically to *religious* emotions—shows that such a conceptual analysis makes sense.¹⁷

In common life people do refer to the love for Christ or the Prophet; they express their fear for Divine Wrath or their longing for Grace or an absolute peace of mind. Many religious traditions also refer to the specific

joy and sense of wholeness effectuated by prayer or the religious life in general. As Roberts defends: emotions are complex concern-based constructions involving specific evaluations and perceptions, as well as feeling and bodily reactions. Why could one not speak then of a general concern of the religiously minded soul which structures and shapes, so to speak, a panoply of emotions and affective states which flourish through this religiously inspired commitment? This religious commitment could further be described in terms of the narrative order established by a certain religious tradition. Interwoven with moral and ritual practices, such a narrative order then forms the value-horizon that gives the religious emotions an existential and symbolic significance typical for the religious way of life as such. This conceptualisation should, however, also leave room—so Jarveläinen stresses following William James—for the specific relation of the religious mind to the Absolute. For without this specific experience of transcendence, it is hard to make sense of the intentionality of religious emotions.

Religion is a realm of human life that has considered, in all cultures and times, the role of the emotions as constitutive. Despite growing secularisation, religion still shapes and moulds—as do morals and art, technology and science—the affective life of numerous individuals, and thus their relations to the world and to other people. Religion establishes a value-horizon against which specific attitudes, desires and existential concerns are expressed. Spiritual traditions, in addition to religious practices and institutions, have been established in all cultures—and often these religious traditions function as important catalysts of social and spiritual life. Religion, however, also causes psychic distress. It can lead to fanatic and excessive behaviour which challenges the Aristotelian view of man as an ‘animal rationale’—a view so dear to our Enlightenment culture. Against the background of these considerations one should further develop the quest for the specificity of religion as a constitutive realm of the human condition, for better or worse. And insofar as both religion and the emotions are constitutive for being ‘human’, the quest to understand their interaction is unavoidable.

Most of the following essays draw on material that was presented at the *International Conference on Religious Emotions. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, held at the University of Antwerp in September 2005. This conference was the outcome of a four year research project, sponsored by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) and by the Research Council of the University of Antwerp. We are grateful that Desiree Berendsen and Ann Van Eechaute joined our Philosophy

Department to conduct this research. The project benefited significantly from the input given by various guest speakers and colleagues we had the honour of welcoming in Antwerp in the course of this project. We are especially grateful to Susan James, William Lyons, Donald Ainslie, Thomas Dixon, Peter Goldie, Wessel Stoker, Petri Järveläinen, Robert C. Roberts, Herman De Dijn, Gabor Boros, Mark Wynn, John Corrigan and Robert C. Solomon.

The first five chapters of this collection try to elucidate the nature of religious emotions. What are the components of religious emotions? Do they differ from religious experience? Are they universally given or culturally constructed? The chapters 6 till 12 take a more historical perspective. They correct the idea that only in recent times emotions received the attention they deserve. Religious emotions prove to be prominently present as well in the Christian tradition of the West, as in our philosophical inheritance. The chapters 13 till 16 elaborate on some paradigmatic aspects concerning the specificity of religious emotions: imagination, emptiness, compassion and oceanic feeling. The philosophical study of religious emotions has only just begun. Robert C. Solomon, to whose memory we dedicate this book, reminds us in the last chapter of what makes this study notwithstanding worthwhile. A better understanding of the emotions is essential to gain insight in the nature of religion. This insight could in its turn induce the idea that the human emotional spectrum is far wider than often supposed.

Notes

¹ Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions*, Doubleday-Anchor, New York 1976 ; William Lyons, *Emotion*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980; Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1987 ; Robert M. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions : Investigations in Cognitive Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987 ; Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons : An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*, Routledge, London 1988 ; O. Harvey Green, *The Emotions : A Philosophical Theory*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1992.

² Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, Putnam's Son, New York 1994.

³ Cf. Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics. Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Chatto&Windus, London 1997; John Casey, *Pagan Virtue. An Essay in Ethics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990. For publications of Taylor and Nussbaum cf. *infra*.

⁴ Cf. Justin Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions*, Routledge, London 1992 ; Michael Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996 ; Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions. A Theory of Practical Reasoning*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998 ; Richard Wollheim, *The Emotions*, Yale University Press, London&New Haven 1999 ; Peter Goldie, *The Emotions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2000 ; Martha Nussbaum, *Upheaval of Thoughts. The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1985.

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1989, Part III, “The Affirmation of Ordinary Life”. See also his *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2002.

⁷ For more about Hume’s normative account of a mundane ethics, cf.: Willem Lemmens, “Virtue without Providence? The Ethics of Hume’s Religious Scepticism”, in *Bijdragen: International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, 61, 3, 2000, 285-307.

⁸ Nussbaum 2001, 49-55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

¹⁰ On Nussbaum’s views religion and the idea of ‘transcending humanity’ (or a purely mundane moral value-horizon) cf.: Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings. Versions of Transcending Humanity*, SPCK, London 1997, 1§22. Kerr also gives a fine analysis of Iris Murdoch’s Platonic concept of moral vision and its relation to the experience of transcendence (Chapter 4).

¹¹ Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 98-179.

¹³ Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, London 1970. Cited in Dixon 2003, 185.

¹⁴ Chateaubriand, *Génie du Christianisme*, Flammarion, Paris 1966, 302-3.

¹⁵ For the historical transformation of Christian religious affectivity cf. infra Chapter 6: Walter Van Herck, “Lift up your Hearts. On Emotionalism in Religious Experience.”

¹⁶ Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, 20, 56-9.

¹⁷ Petri Järveläinen, *A Study of Religious Emotions*, Luther-Agricola-Society, Helsinki 2000. Cf. also infra, Chapter 1: “What are Religious Emotions?”.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT ARE RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS?

PETRI JÄRVELÄINEN

Emotions such as joy, sorrow, hope, and fear have been widely discussed during the last two decades in the circle of philosophy of mind. It is commonly argued that emotions either are a cognitive act of mind or involve such acts as an essential component. Emotions are not just irrational somatic perturbations and feelings which are associated with bodily movements but they either are or involve cognitive evaluations. For instance, fear is an emotion that consists of an unpleasant feeling and the thought of something dangerous. Correspondingly, joy is an emotion that consists of a pleasant feeling and the thought that something positive is at hand. If a person says 'happy to see you' in an emotional sense of an utterance, he or she has perceived another and formed a self-regarding evaluation according to which seeing another is positive for him or her. Perceiving and evaluating are cognitive phenomena. Without them a pleasant or unpleasant feeling would be senseless. In brief, emotions are intentional phenomena. Intentionality of emotions means that they are directed to objects, external or internal or both. Even the most known theory of emotions in modern thinking, namely that put forward by William James, involves the idea of intentionality even though it has been characterised as a feeling-theory of emotions. According to James, bodily movements are caused by 'exciting fact'.

From ancient theologians via Protestant Reformers to Friedrich Schleiermacher, William James and Rudolf Otto, several theological writers have turned their focus on the 'inner man' and the special religious feeling of the soul. The mainstream Christian tradition has interpreted the spiritual life in terms of a dialectical relationship between fear and love, a notion which can be traced back to Plato's *Philebus*. One might suppose that also the modern philosophical discussion had inspired theologians and philosophers of religion. For instance, mainly based upon A. J. Ayer's view of religious language as emotional language, some theologians and

philosophers of religion used to argue that religious language does not have an extramental significance but expresses inner feelings rather. In the light of recent discussion on emotions, this view is at first sight problematic, and in this sense the recent discussion could open the way for new insights into the role of emotions in religion. However, the question of religious emotions has not been particularly central in the contemporary philosophy of religion. In dealing with psychological phenomena associated with religion, the mainstream approach within the philosophy of religion has been to focus on the question of 'religious experience', in particular its evidential force.

In my opinion, more independent analysis of religious emotions would be fruitful with respect to deepening our understanding not only of religious emotions, but of religion itself. Moreover, I believe that the history of theology looks a little bit different when read from the experiential point of view. In what follows, I will briefly characterise the discussion of emotions in contemporary philosophy of mind and will sketch out a view as to how one should understand emotions. According to this view, emotions involve at least two compounds: an affective-feeling component and a cognitive component. I will then apply that view to the question of religious emotions and suggest that typical religious emotions are natural emotions which involve characteristic cognitive, personal and practical aspects.

1. Emotions in the philosophy of mind

The ideas put forward in the recent discussion of emotions in the philosophy of mind can be traced back to ancient philosophy.¹ Aristotle's analysis of various emotions involves three common components. First, emotions involve an evaluation stating that something positive or negative is happening in a relevant way to the subject. Secondly, the former gives rise to a pleasant or unpleasant feeling that signifies an awareness of one's or someone else's position. Finally, Aristotle thought that there are somatic changes associated with emotions which may influence an emotional state.² For the Stoic philosopher Chrysippos, emotions are false judgments. In spite of their irrationality, emotions as judgments are cognitive phenomena. In the Stoic context, a judgment means an assent to a proposition. Stoic emotions, such as distress, pleasure, appetite and fear, consist of two judgments: that something is good or bad and that one should react in a certain way. It was Seneca in particular who, in later Stoic discussion, added to this characterisation the notion of the first movements of the soul. He thought that bodily reactions were something

like pre-emotions, which are not full-fledged emotions if they are not associated with the judgment of mind.³

The Stoics had a negative view of the emotions. They thought that the soul is badly disturbed and damaged by uncontrolled emotions. Learning to see the world and one's position therein from the point of view of *logos* frees us wholly of the emotions. This is called *apatheia*. Aristotle had a more positive attitude toward emotions. According to his view, one should learn to emote correctly insofar as emotions are a constitutive element of the virtuous life. Furthermore, the Stoics believed that judgment is essential for emotions: emotions are embedded in a psychophysical setting, but in order to analyse them it is sufficient to concentrate on judgments. Aristotle's view is broader. For him, analysing emotions means that the psycho-physical setting is taken into an account.

In recent discussions some authors such as Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum have followed the Stoic path and argued that emotions either are or involve judgments. For Solomon, emotions are constitutive (sets of) judgments we make concerning both ourselves and the world. Emotions are our choices that create our personality and give meaning and colour to our world.⁴ For Nussbaum, an emotion involves an acceptance of a belief.⁵ One topic of discussion is whether all emotions involve a belief. For instance, Patricia Greenspan has pointed out that many emotions involve uncertain affective thoughts rather than beliefs.⁶

It has been more popular to deal with emotions as complexes than to concentrate on beliefs and judgment. For O. Harvey Green and Robert Gordon, emotions also involve volitional aspects. According to Green, emotions are structures of desire and belief. The basic emotions can be analysed as follows: gladness: A believes with certainty that p and A desires that p; sorrow: A believes with certainty that p and A desires that not-p; hope: A believes without certainty that p and A desires that p; fear: A believes without certainty that p and A desires that not-p.⁷ For Gordon, beliefs and desires are causes of the effects which are designated by emotion-terms.⁸ Both of these theories are problematic. Emotions as complexes have been analysed more successfully in componential theories which follow the Aristotelian line of thinking.

According to William Lyons, typical emotions are constituted by several components such as perception, belief, evaluation, desire, behavioural suggestion, physiological changes and their registrations, and feelings. For his causal-evaluative theory, in order to be deemed an emotion, a mental phenomenon has to involve self-regarding evaluation (judgment) that causes abnormal physiological changes.⁹ Also Patricia Greenspan argues that the core of emotions is constituted by two

components. According to her view, emotions are affective states of comfort or discomfort directed to the cognitive content which is articulated by evaluative propositions.¹⁰ Justin Oakley suggests that emotions are complexes of cognitions, behavioural suggestion and affect. I believe Oakley is right concerning numerous emotions but there are emotions which do not seem to involve any call to action. Oakley sketches out a fascinating notion of psychic feelings and affects. According to his view, we are not aware of all emotions as physiological states but rather as states of mind.¹¹ It may be interesting to note that this kind of idea can be traced back to medieval discussion on emotions. It was William of Ockham who first argued that there are lower emotions of the body and upper emotions of the will.¹²

To my knowledge, the most extensive theory of emotions is the one put forward by Ronald de Sousa. He argues that emotions show similarities to beliefs, desires and perceptions, but cannot be reduced to them. He analyses the object-directed aspects of emotions as a set of attitudes which are learnt in situations he calls 'paradigm-scenarios'. They involve characteristic objects of specific emotion-types and characteristic responses to them. De Sousa thinks that emotions are culturally dependent. We learn some emotions very early in life, while other, higher skills are presupposed to have their corresponding emotions. By reading novels and listening to music, a person becomes acquainted with the emotional repertoire of a culture.¹³

2. The generic condition of emotions

I agree with the componential theories and I think that theories equating emotions either to feelings or cognitions are wrong: concerning the characterisation of emotions, the answer is not either/or but both/and. In my view, all emotions involve an affective feeling component and an evaluative cognitive component. The first component is particularly essential in identifying a mental phenomenon as an emotion. The latter is crucial for distinguishing emotions from each other and identifying an emotion as a certain emotion. I call this the generic condition of emotions. Let us consider briefly both of those components.

In my view the cognitive component is embedded in a larger system of cognitive attitudes. For instance, if a person fears a dog, there is (1) an external object, a dog; (2) the perception to which it gives rise; (3) the inner object or intentional object, thought of the dog; (4) the self-regarding evaluation of a dog that involves two aspects: an attitude (belief, thought, etc.) that a dog is harmful and the notion that a dog is harmful just for

oneself. I agree with those authors who think that the cognitive attitude associated with an emotion is not necessarily a belief. It may be just a thought, image, guess, etc. I am willing to characterise cognitions broadly in order to apply my view, for instance, to emotions caused by music. Concerning 'pure music', in my opinion, it is the form that affects a person. Furthermore, sometimes music causes objectless moods rather than emotions. Moods, however, may be objects of emotions and in such a case a person gives some content to mood.

The affective-feeling component is caused by the cognitive component. Affections are bodily changes that may be taken also as mental changes. Feelings are unanalysable qualia, unpleasant or pleasant states of consciousness by virtue of which one is aware of one's state and the cognitive system associated with it. So, it seems to me, that in typical emotions there are at least two main intentional stages. First, there is an intentional stage associated with perceptions and evaluations. Second, there is an intentional stage associated with feelings. The cognitive component is directed to the content of the object of an emotion. Usually the object is perceived in an extramental world, but in numerous emotions it is just an intramental content of thinking and remembering. The affective-feeling component is directed to the cognitive component via effects caused by the cognitive component.

3. Three specific conditions of religious emotions

In the famous passage from *The City of God* characterising the affections of Christians, Augustine writes: "They fear eternal punishment and desire eternal life."¹⁴ In dividing basic religious emotional attitudes into positive and negative feelings he follows the idea put forward by Plato in his *Philebus*.¹⁵ The idea of mixed feelings of fear and love/desire was widely accepted as a Christian model of religious affections in ancient theology. Besides Augustine, it was also made use of by Gregory the Great who formed his theology of spirituality upon the notion of two compunctions, namely: the compunction of love and the compunction of fear.¹⁶ In modern theology, this tradition was continued by Rudolf Otto, who argued that religion is based upon an affective awareness of God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The term *tremor* refers to the feelings of awe, majesty and energy whereas the term *fascinans* refers to the feelings of attraction and wonderfulness.¹⁷ It is fascinating that this tradition of mixed religious feelings has gone through history in such an unbroken form. Besides intellectual tradition, the history of religious emotions is a strong

and vivid history that one can encounter in all times and cultures. What are religious feelings or emotions?

Many writers both in classical and modern philosophy of religion have supposed that religious emotions, or at least some of them, are variations of general emotions. For instance, Augustine—who adopted the Platonic theory of the soul—thought that passions are located in the lower part of the soul whereas the will belongs to the immaterial upper part of the soul. As motions of the lower part of the soul, emotions are psychosomatic. Simple physical pleasure and pain are not emotions. Emotions are reactions of the emotional part of the soul. They involve an emotional evaluation, an emotional feeling, and typical bodily changes. Even though Augustine believed that the emotions of Christians are directed according to the spirit, he thought that religious fear, desire, pain, hope, and joy are natural emotions in the lower part of the soul.¹⁸ In modern philosophy of religion, William James, for instance, thought that religious emotions are variations of natural emotions.¹⁹

Besides the notion of natural religious emotions, there is a theological tradition that has argued for special spiritual emotions caused by the Holy Spirit.²⁰ The tradition was put forward by Alexandrian theologians. Friedrich Schleiermacher's notions of religious disposition and feeling of dependence are modern variations of this tradition even though he interpreted it in a profane way. Schleiermacher believed that all people have a latent religious consciousness. I will return to this view below. The tradition of specific spiritual abilities and senses involves both theological and philosophical questions of its own, and I have dealt with it in another context.²¹ One of the interesting themes associated with it is the notion of *homo religiosus* adopted by some theories of comparative studies in religion. It may be of interest to note that this notion can be traced back to the tradition of mystical theology, and in this sense it is rather theological or philosophical belief than a scientific notion in a strict sense of the word. For my purposes here, however, it is necessary to concentrate on 'natural' religious emotions and questions associated with them only.

3.1. The cognitive object condition

According to the generic condition of emotions sketched out above, emotions involve an affective feeling component and an evaluative cognitive component. Taken for granted that religious emotions are variations of general emotions, the generic condition can be applied to them. The structure of religious emotions is similar to general emotions: they are pleasant or unpleasant feelings directed to cognitive contents of

mind. If so, how to distinguish religious emotions from emotions in general?

Distinguishing emotions from each other by virtue of their cognitive contents is crucial for cognitive theories of emotions. So, I argue that in distinguishing religious emotions from other emotions, the point of departure (and thus *not* the whole story) should be the cognitive component. Even James, whose theory is usually known as a feeling theory, writes that religious emotions are "concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling plus a specific sort of object."²² For James, the object is that of consciousness and he thinks that it is associated with a person's awareness of himself or herself in relation to the divine. In my view, religious emotions involve a thought of the divine as their essential component. I call this the cognitive object condition of religious emotions.

The notion of the cognitive object condition may be criticised in different ways. First, one can say that the cognitive approach is not plausible since it is precisely feelings that are essential in religious life, not cognitive contents. Secondly, even if the cognitive approach is accepted, the notion of the divine is problematic.

Given this criticism of the cognitive approach, what kind of view could be an alternative to it? If one argues, say, that emotions should be distinguished in terms of feelings, one encounters the problem of their unanalysable character. Feelings are unpleasant and pleasant experiences of consciousness. Their intensity varies and they may be mixed. However, as experiences they are dumb. It might even be that different emotions involve similar feelings. If a person is happy to see another person and if he or she is happy to read a good philosophical article, he or she may feel similarly 'happy' in both cases even though two different emotions are involved. Correspondingly, it has been argued that two different emotions may cause similar states in brains; alternatively, the same emotion may generate various brain states.²³ Furthermore, an advocate of the cognitive view is not necessarily claiming that feelings are not important in religion. He or she is but arguing that in identifying religious emotions the point of departure should be the cognitive content of those emotions.

Concerning the criticism of the notion of the divine, it is true, for instance, that not all religions involve the concept of God. In some theological traditions, religion consists of metaphorical language that expresses the inner experiences of a person but does not involve any transcendental dimension. Moreover, a person may feel an emotion which involves the notion of the divine, but it seems that his or her emotion is not a religious emotion. For instance, if a tourist wandering in a Japanese

temple says, "nice gods here," this kind of an utterance may express something else than a religious attitude.

For one thing, in characterising religious emotions the point of departure should be the standard cases rather than the exceptions. I don't find atheistic interpretations of religion philosophies or religiously oriented world-views more preferable than attitudes adopted by religious people and institutions. It is a common Western idea that religion, as Cicero put it, is a link between men and god or gods. Also in ordinary language religion is something associated with transcendent. The term 'divine' is an open term that does not define strictly any theological content. It just refers to something outside the human mind and world. What makes 'something outside the human mind and world' religious is a different question dealt with below. Moreover, it should be taken into account that the notion of cognitive object is not necessarily associated with an attitude of assent. For instance, a praying person may have an attitude such as "Listen to me, if there is anybody out there." Accordingly, a person gazing in wonder at a nice landscape may suddenly remember a sentence 'by tranquil streams he leads me' and feel religiously without forming a belief that there is a Creator.

Furthermore, the cognitive object condition does not give an answer to the question concerning the cause or causes of religious emotions. In applying Patricia Greenspan's theory, one could say that the cognitive object condition concerns the inner cause of religious emotions in such a way that the thought of the divine can be regarded as an internal object causing comfortable or uncomfortable affects in a person. The question concerning the outer object—that is, the cause of an inner object—remains open. A believer who has religious faith may believe that his or her thought of the divine is caused by the Holy Spirit. A person who does not have religious faith may give another kind of explanation for religious emotions. For example, Sigmund Freud believed that the origin of religious emotions lies in traumatic and neurotic experiences which are tied to power, authority, sexuality and guilt.²⁴

Moreover, some contemporary authors have paid attention to the fact that if moods and other psychosomatic states can dispose the mind to feel emotions, it is nevertheless difficult to judge what has caused an occurrent emotion.²⁵ Let us imagine that a person has drunk ten cups of coffee. He or she is listening to a religious program on the radio. Suddenly the person begins to feel an unpleasant emotion, for instance fear of eternal punishment. What is the reason for this? The answer could be 'too much coffee', 'the mournful voice of the speaker', or 'the listener is repenting his or her sins'. Independently of the answer, the emotion would look the

same in all cases. I referred above to the traditional theory of the spiritual senses and experiences. The theological answers to the philosophical problem presented here have been raised within this tradition.

The cognitive object condition is a necessary but not sufficient condition of religious emotions. It is true that there are emotions directed to religious objects which are not religious emotions. Some other aspects than those expressed by the cognitive component are necessary when characterising religious emotions. In what follows I will sketch out two further conditions that I call the depth condition and the pragmatic condition. According to the depth condition, the object of a religious emotion is existentially significant for the subject feeling it. According to the pragmatic condition, the thought of the divine is associated with religious practises such as worship, praying, or meditation.

3.2. The depth condition

Our tourist in a Japanese temple is just admiring symbols of foreign gods. One could say that they cause something to occur in a person. In this sense they are existentially significant for a person. I am not pursuing this kind of existential significance, however. Rather, I refer to the significance that characterises one's commitments and personality.

It seems that in order to be deemed religious, emotions have to be self-regarding. William James thought that the object of a religious emotion is a person *in relation* to the divine. One finds a similar description in Friedrich Schleiermacher's and Rudolf Otto's descriptions of religious emotions. For Schleiermacher, religious emotions are associated with relation, namely that characterised by dependence.²⁶ Correspondingly, Rudolf Otto thought that the roots of the religious emotions of awe and love rest upon the mental state called creature-feeling.²⁷ Taking into an account the self-regarding nature of religious emotions, it makes sense to argue that religious emotions are associated with personal identity. Feeling religiously illuminates for a feeling subject who he or she is. Feeling religiously proves that a person is a religious person.

The question arises, however, concerning what it means to be a religious person. In pursuing the answer to this question, one can think that there is a specific religious ability in a mind, which means that the concept of person is characterised substantially, or rather that the concept of person should be characterised functionally. Historically, in the theories of Schleiermacher and Otto, it has been thought that one has a primordial inner capacity for an affective relation to God. In these theories it has been supposed that actualisations of natural inclination to religious experiences