

# Social Psychology of **Emotion**

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## Enlightenment Philosophies of Emotion

### Key Aims

In this chapter we will present some of the key philosophers of the enlightenment, who made significant contributions to emotion studies. In doing so we will:

- Critically introduce how the so called 'age of reason' was also an 'age of emotion'
- Discuss the important rationalist and empiricist debates on emotion
- Look at conceptualisations of emotion in moral decision making practices
- Introduce some influential psychologies which also included important social elements

### Introduction

The enlightenment is often described as 'the age of reason'. It is notoriously associated with rationalist philosophers. The new methods of the age of reason instituted a clear break from scholasticism that dominated the medieval period and the associated metaphysics arising from theologically informed philosophies. Although it is often presumed that there is a clear break between 'the medieval', 'the renaissance', 'the modern' or 'the enlightenment' periods of philosophy there is just as much continuity between them, as Copleston informs us,

We can of course, become the slaves of words or labels. That is to say, because we divide history into periods, we may tend to lose sight of continuity and of gradual transitions, especially when we are looking at historical events from a great distance in time... change is not creation out of nothing (Copleston, 1985: 3)

For example, three out of four so called ‘enlightenment philosophers’ we discuss below had some form of faith in the divine: Descartes was a professed Catholic, Spinoza was Jewish and retained some belief in a God (although considered heretical by other members of the Jewish faith) and Kant retained notions of a Christian God. These thinkers were not primarily theologians (in the professional sense) but philosophers, a discipline that was emerging as no longer the handmaiden of theology. Philosophy was also becoming more widely read and attractive to the lay person, as it was no longer necessary to write in Latin but the vernacular was now widely used. One of the main distinguishing features of the Age of Reason was the break from the traditional theological metaphysics and scholastic methods that characterised the medieval period to purer forms of philosophy, particularly in relation to the development and understanding of ethical systems. As we shall see, new understandings of emotion (passion) were central to these endeavours. In this chapter we look at two competing epistemologies that were ferociously debated throughout this period: rationalism and its antithesis empiricism. We will also look at what is commonly considered as the synthesis between these two epistemologies.

A useful distinction between the two traditions is to characterise them as using either inductive or deductive methods. Francis Bacon was at the forefront of the rise of inductivism through embracing and valuing the technological advances that would serve science and culture, such as printing, gunpowder and the magnet. For Bacon this was achieved not through Aristotelian physics but through the advancement of the natural sciences. He advocated a new philosophy with the experimental inductive method at its heart. This method went on to influence the empiricist tradition, particularly in Britain. Empiricism regards sense-perception of prime importance to the development of knowledge. This was true for the empiricist, in relation to developing knowledge in the sciences, and was understood as the way that individuals psychologically develop factual knowledge about the world. However, the empiricists regarded this form of knowing as necessarily limited: it could never bring about certainty, but only varying degrees of probability. Indeed, unlike the rationalists, the empiricists were essentially radically sceptical of the ability of the human to obtain knowledge that could be considered absolutely certain. The rationalists, however, tended to agree that certainty could be obtained through deductive reasoning, such as mathematics and geometry. As we will see through this chapter, the empiricists argued that propositions derived through, for example mathematics, do not give us factual information about the world but are tautological, as Hume put it: they are merely relations between ideas.

We begin with two prominent rationalists of this period, Descartes and Spinoza. In looking at the ideas of these two philosophers we think through some of the enlightenment theorisations of how things exist (ontologically) in relation to the social psychology of emotion. Descartes was a central figure in the development of continental rationalism. In his famous book *Meditations on First Philosophy* he devises a radical form of scepticism by discarding all beliefs that cannot be considered as certain to uncover knowledge that can be claimed as certain and axiomatic. This would lead him, he believed, to ‘prove’ the existence of God.

Obviously Descartes had pretty high hopes! One of the legacies of this endeavour was a conceptual split between the metaphysics of mind and the matter of body, and it is of central interest to us the role that Descartes envisaged emotion played as an integral node of connection between mind and body. Spinoza, whose telling book title is *Ethics demonstrated in a geometrical manner*, is the second rationalist philosopher that we look at. He was relatively opposed to Descartes' ontological dualism and instead proposed a form of monism that brought him to some extremely interesting theories of the passions, which have only recently begun to have an impact on Western thought about emotion. For instance, Spinoza is a key theoretical resource for post-structural theories of emotion (affect theories) (see Chapter 9). After discussing Descartes and Spinoza, we turn to the moral sentimentalist theories of the empiricists with a focus on the work of Hume who was particularly concerned with how emotion played a central role in moral deliberation. We then move on to Kant who is often characterised as vehemently opposed to Hume's moral sentimentalism and advocated a view of ethics that requires one to do away with emotion (rather like the Stoics) in order to become the 'rational being'.

Therefore this chapter illustrates how the enlightenment enabled the emergence of relatively new forms of philosophy and importantly innovative understandings of the psychological workings of the mind (early psychologies) with some additional emphasis on the social. Descartes emphasised the social development of emotion; Spinoza considered emotion as essentially relational; Hume discussed the fundamental importance of emotion in binding people together in ethical systems and Kant theorised the importance of suppressing emotion for societies to develop morally.

## Descartes' Little Gland

Descartes suggested that mind and body are separate substances; but while the body is a material (physical) extended substance the mind is a spiritual (meta-physical) unextended substance. This is now known as Cartesian dualism, which has its roots in the early theologies we looked at, where, for example, the soul is seen as separate to the body. Although Descartes used the French term '*émotion*' to define a specific part of his theory, for the main he was writing on the 'passions', and indeed, most commentators since have associated him with a language of passions rather than emotions (although this is slightly misleading as we will see). Nevertheless, Descartes' writings were a significant source of influence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through his framing of the relationship between 'body' and 'soul'.

For Descartes, core to passions are the perceptions through which sensory information passes to the soul. The key distinction between the body and soul is that the latter is not a spatially extended substance as it cannot be located in a particular space, either internal or external to the body. And yet, it is central to

the psychological experience of the passions, namely the phenomenologically-oriented feeling(s) that arise from the perceptual movements of the body. This was a significant shift from the dominant Aristotelian theories of the passions that preceded Descartes. Rather than dividing the soul up into parts as Aristotle had done (the nutritive, sensitive and intellectual parts), Descartes argued it is 'thinking' that is essential to the soul and therefore living organisms that do not have this capacity, do not have a soul. Hence the only power of the soul is 'to think', so Descartes is able to do away with the meticulous descriptions of the powers of the soul that his predecessors had laboriously conjectured. Thinking for Descartes did not include such functions involved in for example, nutrition, digestion and other bodily movements, but only processes that explicitly concerned consciousness. We may think about digestion, but this is not necessary to digest. The body then for Descartes is a purely mechanical material substance, while the mind is purely spiritual; the latter has the power of independent volition while the former does not (because it is causally determined). The passions then for Descartes are nominally 'perceptions' of bodily motions. These passionate perceptions agitate and 'disturb' the soul in more powerful ways than other forms of perception that he discusses. However, one can still see the trajectory of thought in relation to conceiving the passions being passive as they are considered as being involuntary perceptions of bodily movements. This notion of course derives from Aristotle and was configured by Aquinas.

The question raised by the mind-body distinction for Descartes was; if they are indeed two distinct substances, how do they interact with each other? Descartes suggested that the two substances met in the pineal gland (an endocrine gland seated near the brain stem). '[T]he ultimate and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is none other than the agitation with which the spirits move the little gland which is in the middle of the brain' (Gross, 2006: 1). The linking of the body and soul through the pineal gland in the brain allowed Descartes to articulate a causal trajectory for the production of passions, in which bodily perceptions move through the body to the pineal gland, at which point they directly catalyse passionate experience in the soul. This process can be two-way in terms of passions reverberating back into bodily movement and producing physical manifestations of passionate experience (e.g. hairs standing on end when experiencing fear).

## The Bio-Social Factors

Descartes' theory of the passions relies heavily on biological and social factors. He believed that certain passions can be innate as they are inherited during pregnancy from one's mother, e.g. preference for a particular food. He also posited that an individual's experience of a passion is dependent on the physical characteristics of their brain as well as the balance of 'bile and other humours in the blood, for instance, which affect its temperature and mobility' (James, 1997: 98). The specific

manifestation of passionate experience depends not only on these physical characteristics, but also how they interact with the social context in and through which they emerge. For instance, if an individual experiences a traumatic association in childhood (e.g. falling from a playground swing), that activity will form a pattern in the brain of fear, which will be elicited every time the child subsequently sees a playground swing. Whilst for other children playing on the swing will be a pleasurable experience, for the child who fell, it will remain a negative association, which is manifest in the biochemical configuration of the brain.

Therefore, Descartes' theory of passions involves several biological and social elements, and is also individually specific. Passions develop by repeatedly experiencing the same bodily movement, producing increasingly strong patterns in the brain, although they can also emerge through 'recollections of the soul' (James, 1997: 100). Such recollections are not 'memories' in a traditional sense, but are dependent on contents of the soul that were produced by past events 'whose only remaining trace is in the body' (James, 1997: 99). Here we see that for Descartes the passions are intrinsically dependent upon potentially complex and changeable configurations of body and soul, which connect in and through the pineal gland.

Although Descartes' mind-body dualism tends to render the passions as that which traverse the two substances, it is only the mind that should be used to perceive clearly and distinctly, and thus should withdraw from the passions and other bodily motions. Hence Descartes thought that knowledge that comes to the mind through the body is unreliable and only reason (the *a priori*) could bring certainty, so Descartes firmly fits into the rationalist school of philosophy. But, and it is quite an important 'but', emotion (as distinct from passion), takes on a different meaning for Descartes, one which is not often mentioned by subsequent portrayals of Cartesian dualism. Thinking that originates in the mind gives way to what Descartes describes as 'intellectual emotion'. Descartes states that for clear thinking one should ignore that which arises from within body, although intellectual inquiry that begins within the mind is accompanied by intellectual emotion that sustains and encourages the inquiry. Intellectual emotion, in turn, gives rise to certain passions such as wonder, desire for knowledge and joy in philosophising. Intellectual emotion, however, has no bodily expression, as it is the passions that it gives way to that are expressed in the body. James (1997: 207) argues that this division is 'uncomfortably' close to Aristotle's division between the sensitive and the intellectual soul (as discussed in Chapter 1). The split between the emotions of the mind and the passions of the body is one that is taken up by Spinoza, but in a distinctly non-Aristotelian theory of the soul.

## Spinoza and *affectus*

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was a Dutch seventeenth-century philosopher who was seventeen when Descartes died. Spinoza was heavily influenced by Descartes'

philosophy of the passions, and it catalysed his own writings on emotions (which he called affects and passions). Indeed, the categories of passions Spinoza began with were taken almost entirely from Descartes. Spinoza's primary text, which is often cited as 'The Ethics' but was actually entitled '*Ethics demonstrated in a geometrical manner*', was published posthumously in 1677 (it had been ready in 1675 but Spinoza had delayed publishing it as he feared it would be seen as the work of an atheist (Jarrett, 2007)). The Ethics was a substantive piece of philosophical work on the nature of God, mind, body, emotion and ethics. It was written in the context of Descartes' dualistic theory being the primary source of understanding of the human condition, although, as we will see, Spinoza took a different approach than Descartes.

## Conatus

Spinoza believed in three basic affects : desire, joy and sadness. (He used the word affect when discussing what we now term 'emotions'. Several translations of 'The Ethics' incorrectly translate *affectus* as emotion, despite the fact that Spinoza never used the word 'emotion'). Desire is the most general and basic affect. He referred to it as 'conatus', which means a general endeavour to prolong, to survive. Spinoza believed that the primary human force was this desire to prolong one's life, to persist. Here we can see that the notion of power is key. To be able to prolong one's life, one needs the power to do so. Indeed, power is central to the definition of the two other basic affects for Spinoza; joy is an increase in one's power, whilst sadness is a decrease. Power is not understood as something used in a hierarchical sense, used by those with it over those who do not. Spinoza's notion of power was more nuanced, a way to define relations between people and objects. For Spinoza, power was the means through which activity was produced. All social activity is seen as being produced through movements of power that lessen and/or increase bodies' capacities for affective activity. In addition to desire, sadness, and joy a range of more complex affects exist, such as anger and fear, which are made up of differing configurations of the three basic affects. Spinoza argues that affects should not be viewed as some form of frailty of humanity, a defect of the mind/body, but actually be seen as 'natural phenomena' (E. III, p 127). This means they are produced in the same way as any other natural phenomena, in terms of having 'causal laws' (E. III, p 127).

Affects for Spinoza are not subject to some notion of 'free will' because they are subject to the causal laws of the natural world. We should note that Spinoza also used the term 'passions', when drawing out a broad distinction between activity and passivity. Affects, which was the dominant term, referred primarily to the body's capacities to act, and changes in those capacities. Passions on the other hand are what Spinoza thinks of as 'passive affects', which can be thought of as 'inadequate' because it is difficult to have a clear idea of the causal relation through which they are formed. Affects then refer to volition and feelings of

control, regardless of whether one's power increases or decreases. Passions on the other hand relate to feelings of a lack of control, whereby any change in the body's power, and associated mindful idea, are experienced as caused by something outside of one's control. Hence passions are seen as passive, and relate to the category of sadness, as to be without control is to be sad.

## A Dual-aspect Monism

Spinozist theory has been differentiated from Descartes through defining it as a 'dual aspect monism' (James, 1997: 142). This means that Spinoza did not view mind and body as fundamentally distinct substances, but rather as two attributes of a unified substance. He states 'that mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived first under the attribute of thought, secondly, under the attribute of extension' (E. III, prop 2, note: 131). Consequently, Spinoza saw all activity as being 'two-sided'; one side relating to activity of the body and one side to activity of the mind. Neither side can act as a causal force on the other and therefore a clear distinction could not be made on the grounds of either body or mind holding a total position of power over the other. In this sense, Spinoza's theory of affect sought to move on from the dualism core to Descartes, and to do so through emphasising power relations between 'natural phenomena' (which included human bodies), rather than rely on marking out clear boundaries within individuals (i.e. between body and mind).

## Affective Change

Spinoza felt that Descartes' ultimate aim was to articulate a theory in which the mind has complete control over the body, and yet for Spinoza, affective change could only be enacted by external forces. Indeed, Spinoza was not particularly interested in physiological factors related to affect, only insofar as they run alongside the operation of the mind. Part of the reason for this is the onus Spinoza places on the pantheist view of a unity of substance, named God. In *The Ethics* Spinoza states: '[A]ll modes of thinking have for their cause God, by virtue of his being a thinking thing' (E. III. prop 2: 130). This means that bodies cannot cause changes in thought, only God can, through thinking, not the body. Spinoza's dual aspect monism relies on his underlying philosophy of unity, in which he posits one all encompassing nature, of which everything is a part. This is different from Descartes' dualistic rendering of an active and powerful mind controlling the passive 'extended substance' of the body and objects. Spinoza framed this unifying substance as God, meaning very literally that God is all powerful and dominant as everything is a part of the substance of God.

Spinoza's account of affects is more explicitly social than Descartes' theory of passions. As we have seen, core to Spinoza's ethics is the notion that affect is



dependent on the relationships bodies have with external objects (which include other bodies). In addition to this, Spinoza argues that external objects can affect people in a variety of ways. An object does not have a single mode of affect, which is then felt by anyone coming into contact with it. Instead, the experience of affect felt by an individual will always depend upon the specifics of the relationship between their body and the external object it interacts with at the given moment in time. The importance of the relational nature of affect comes from the underlying philosophy of one substance (God/Nature) being the only thing that can act as a causal force. If God/Nature is the only substance, from which all other things are formed, then only God/Nature can be framed as 'free'. Here Spinoza differs from Descartes, for whom the mind can act with active free will, particularly with reference to the passive body. Spinoza's single substance ontology means that mind and body are modes of activity that are formed within the single cause of God/Nature. Moreover, if everything is deemed to emerge as an element of the overall single substance of life then every individuation is by definition relational (no one thing can be characterised as having a distinct essence). An individual's being then becomes dependent on the nature and form of the interactions it has with others. An example would be to think about one's feelings about a past memorable event (e.g. child's birthday) being enacted through the re-engagement with objects associated with that time (e.g. specific present or location) rather than purely as an act of cognitive retrieval from 'inside' one's mind.

This is fundamentally what makes Spinoza's philosophy of affect a social one, and much more so than Descartes' passions. Emotions as we understand and categorise them today (e.g. love, hate, fear, anger) are all relational patterns whose existence is dependent on different configurations of passivity and activity, or in Spinozian terminology, increases or decreases in one's power to act. For instance, we may come to love someone or something that in general increases our powers to act (to affect or be affected). On the other hand, we may come to hate something that in general decreases our powers to act. For Spinoza, the three basic affects, along with all their subsidiaries, can be geometrically understood according to their position on a continuum of increasing to decreasing the power to act.

## Hume and Moral Sentimentalism

In opposition to rationalist philosophy were the philosophers who suggested that emotions (or passions and sentiments) facilitate moral decision making processes. We focus here on David Hume (1711–1776) who was an empiricist and so believed that all useful knowledge that individuals have comes about through sensual (empirical) experience. More particularly Hume was a 'sentimentalist'. Sentimentalism is a moral philosophy which proposes that moral truths are essentially derived from the senses, particularly through feelings,

passions, affect and emotion. The enlightenment's moral sentimentalism did not start with Hume, but he constructed his understanding from a line of British philosophers: the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Butler and Francis Hutcheson. It is a tradition that is now quite well known, but perhaps underappreciated in relation to the enlightenment, which is more often synonymised with 'the age of reason' and its rationalist associates. The sentimentalism of Butler and Hutcheson concentrated on theological notions of how moral sentiments were placed within human nature by God so that we could fathom through introspection the divine laws sculpted into our hearts. Indeed ethics began to be understood as the examining of the realities of the psychic inner world; in other words, this was an early 'experimental' psychology. This was achieved through identifying the sentiments or rather the sympathy (or compassion: see Frazer, 2010: 18) that we have for others. Thus not only was it an early psychology but an early social psychology as sympathy was understood as a bridge between the social and psychological, mental states that are shared between individuals: 'Specifically, sentimentalism offers an empirically grounded sociology and psychology of moral and political reflection that focuses on the key social-psychological faculty of sympathy' (Frazer, 2010: 8).

## Hobbes and Fear

Pitted against this form of sentimentalism are those that advocated human nature as not being fundamentally benevolent but rather saw humans as driven by selfishness and fear. A main proponent of this thesis was Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) who was born in England and lived there throughout the civil war. This was essentially a war between Royalists and Parliamentarians, which saw the execution of King Charles I and the establishment of the first Commonwealth of England, headed by Oliver Cromwell. Throughout this period England was a very chaotic place shaped by numerous competing ideologies; for example, Royalists, Parliamentarians, Catholics and Protestants. Hobbes' psychological and political writings were very much influenced by the chaos of this particular period. His view of humanity was that it was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. He suggested that by nature humans are not social creatures but are in need of a strong sovereign state which needed to govern through fear to keep people in line. This he characterised as the Leviathan (a biblical sea monster), a metaphor of a state ruling over its people with the force of fear. Individuals thus needed to enter into a social contract with the state, through which they would give over their freedoms and be given law and life in return. Without a strong government Hobbes believed that humans would lapse into a state of war of all against all.

Hobbes had a mechanistic and materialist understanding of the world and thus psychic functions. The human mind was understood as machine-like, with mental processes simply consisting of movements of matter inside the skull.

Indeed he was very much the empiricist and so conceived of metaphysical substances, like the mind, as being made up of physical events. Hobbes was particularly interested in movement. He was friends with a lot of influential theorists of the time, including Galileo, who suggested that all physical bodies were in motion, including the earth and everything on the earth. All things would carry on moving in a straight line unless some other force was to act upon them. Hobbes' conceptualisation of psychological motivation was also influenced by this theory. He felt that we were driven by the push and pull of motivation in that we are simply driven by attraction and aversion; for example, liking and disliking, loving and hating, joy and sadness. We are driven (attracted) by the objects of our needs and wants, but moreover we are driven through repulsion and ultimately repulsed through the fear of death.

Much of the writings of the early sentimentalists was spent attempting to refute this form of (selfish) empiricism. However, it turned out to be extremely difficult to prove that human motivation was no more than expressions of self-interest. For example, compassion for another's misfortune could be interpreted as the fear that the same misfortune might happen to oneself. Yet the early sentimentalists insisted that conscience is made up of psychological sensations of the mind which are far more altruistic and benevolent and not selfish in the way Hobbes described. Hutcheson went as far as to suggest that not only do we have the five senses but we also have a 'moral sense'. Just as the eyes can see so can our moral sense determine right from wrong. However, this was the seventh sense, as he also advocated a sixth internal sense for beauty (the aesthetic sense).

## Post-scepticism

Hume was completely against theological or metaphysical views of human activity. Norton (1993) states that Hume is often regarded as advancing empiricism to its logical and sceptical conclusions. However, Norton goes on to argue that Hume should be better known as a 'post-sceptical philosopher':

By this I mean to suggest that Hume supposed (a) that the Cartesians (especially Malebranche) and Locke and Berkeley had in fact already taken traditional metaphysics and epistemology to its sceptical conclusions; (b) that these sceptical conclusions had been soundly and validly established; and (c) that the most important remaining task of philosophy, given these well-established and obvious conclusions, was to show how we are going to get on with our lives, particularly our intellectual lives. (Norton, 1993: 5)

The sceptics' philosophical suppositions brought about the notion of no certainty whatsoever. This presents the question, what of morality and civility? For Hume philosophy had failed and he set about attempting to develop a science of

human nature upon which all other sciences would rest. Although Hume sided with the empiricism of sentimentalism, he was sceptical of the notion of an inner divine moral sense, and went on to distinguish the theological connotations of Hutcheson's 'moral sense' through the concept of 'moral sentiments'.

## Hume's Psychology

Hume began his philosophical endeavour in his two most notable books (*The Enquiries: Concerning the human understanding and concerning the principles of morals* and *The Treatise of Human Nature*) by describing the workings of the 'mental world'; in other words he begins with psychology. In arguing for the importance of starting with psychology, in the *Enquiries* Hume states,

It becomes, therefore, no inconsiderable part of science barely to know the different operations of the mind, to separate them from each other, to class them under their proper heads, and to correct all that seeming disorder, in which they lie involved, when made the object of reflexion and enquiry. This talk of ordering and distinguishing, which has no merit, when performed with regard to external bodies, the objects of our senses, rises in its value, when directed towards the operations of the mind, in proportion to the difficulty and labour, which we meet with in performing it. And if we can go no further than this mental geography, or delineation of the distinct parts of the power of the mind, it is at least a satisfaction to go so far; and the more obvious science may appear (and it is by no means obvious) the more contemptible still must the ignorance of it be esteemed, in all pretenders to learning and philosophy (EHU. 1. 8)

Thus Hume develops his moral sentimental philosophy by firstly thinking about perception; '[A]ll the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two different kinds, which I shall call the Impressions and Ideas' (T 1.1.1). The differences between these two forms of perception are understood through their liveliness or vivacity. Impressions are usually formed through direct sensual experience while ideas are the recollections of these initial impressions. This, Hume states, does not require much explanation as they are self-evidently (through internal observation) the difference between feeling and thinking, the former being more lively and vivacious than the latter. In this way Hume develops a kind of phenomenological perspective regarding external 'reality' and perceptions. His view is that we cannot know the external world but only our perceptions (sensations and ideas) which are in some way related to external objects but may not completely represent them. His endeavour then was to attempt to explain how we come to 'believe' that our perceptions represent the external world. Norton suggests that Hume, in this way, was attempting to rescue philosophy from scepticism.

Hume goes on to distinguish between simple and complex impressions and ideas. The former are made up of rudimentary senses, for example the greenness of an apple, while the latter (complex) would unite the many attributes of the apple (for example, colour, taste, shape etc.). Thus complex impressions and ideas are made up of the simple. Hume's first proposition in the *Treatise* states: '[T]hat all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent' (T 1.1.1). This proposition is the foundation through which Hume develops his empiricism. Thus there is nothing in the mind (ideas) that has not come about firstly through the impressions (senses).

## The Association of Ideas

Hume argued that these ideas in the mind are *causally bound together* through the principles of association, in other words he advocated what we today in psychology call *associationism*. The causal connections (associations) between the ideas were: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. The principle of resemblance can be thought of as a trigger for relating one thing to another. For example, you may meet a woman that *resembles* in some way your mother, thus the associated idea of your mother will be brought to mind. The principle of contiguity suggests that when one idea is followed by another idea, these two ideas are then often bound together and will follow each other associatively on future occasions. So, for example, if one often has cheese with crackers the idea of crackers is likely to bring forth the idea of cheese. The principle of cause and effect suggests that we often look for causes of events. For example, if someone has died we often want to know the cause of death which in turn leads to thoughts about causes of deaths in general.

## Reason Enslaved to Passion

Hume's famous dictum was that '[R]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' (T 2.3.3). This saying was of course quite controversial at the time, as Hume himself points out, and as we have to some degree (albeit critically) attested to in the previous sections of the book that,

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, 'tis said, is oblig'd to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principal challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, 'till it be entirely

subdu'd, or at least brought to a conformity with the superior principle. On this method of thinking the greatest part of moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this suppos'd pre-eminence of reason above passion. (T 2.3.3)

Hume's full account of the passions can be found in his second book in the *Treatise*. He understands them as 'secondary or reflective impressions', that is they are not 'sensory impressions' but arise from them. In other words, he states that they arise from 'all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures' (T 2.1.1) which essentially emanate from the body. The associationism that we had just discussed was concerned with the association of ideas (rather than impressions). Hume suggests that changeableness is essential to human nature and 'Tis difficult for the mind, when actuated by any passion, to confine itself to that passion alone, without any change or variation' (T 2.1.4). For example '[G]rief and disappointment give rise to anger, anger to envy, envy to malice to grief again...' (T 2.1.4). Unlike ideas that are associated by resemblance, contiguity and causation, impressions are only associated through resemblance. Hume also divided the secondary impressions between those that are calm or violent. As the distinction suggests, the violent passion will be stronger in its felt intensity than the calm passion. This is different to its strength, which is the degree to which it can influence decision making. Strong passions may be calm but have the ability to overcome a violent passion. Importantly Hume stresses that it is not reason which curtails a passion, but it can only be quashed by another passion: 'Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse' (T 2.3.3). Here we particularly see how Hume argues against the rationalist conjectures that reason has pre-eminence over passion. Although he concedes that reason can discover why we might feel the pleasure or pain that comes from an impression, it 'alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, I infer, that the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion' (T 2.3.3). Hume additionally argues that passions are not in and of themselves irrational (he uses the term 'unreasonable'). He employs quite a convoluted argument here to stress the point that reason draws on ideas, and passion is induced by secondary impressions; and so impressions, unlike ideas, do not have a 'representative quality' of other objects.

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possess'd with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the

disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent. (T 2.3.3)

For Hume then, passions cannot be unreasonable, or associated to reason as they are of a completely different order. For a passion to be considered unreasonable Hume argues, it must be accompanied by a false judgment, and in which case it is the judgment that is unreasonable and not the passion. One of the examples he uses to illustrate this is '[T]is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger' (T 2.3.3). Strength of mind then, is not the ability to reason, but 'implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent' (T 2.3.3).

## Sympathy and the Psychosocial

It is through Hume's understanding of sympathy and its relation to the self and others that we begin to see a genuinely 'social' aspect to his philosophy. Hume remarks that,

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (T 2.1.11)

Indeed sympathy is so remarkable to Hume that he understands it as conferring to individuals a sense of self that importantly comes from shared societal passions.

A good-natur'd man finds himself in an instant of the same humour with his company; and even the proudest and most surly take a tincture from their countrymen and acquaintance. A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natur'd temper and disposition. (T 2.1.11)

Hume suggests that in everyday activity we witness various signs in the conversations, countenance and behaviour of others which give us an idea of the possible related passions. When infused with sympathy the idea becomes so lively and vivacious that it actualises as an impression and hence 'the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection' (317). This form of sympathy is bound up with what Hume declares are impressions of ourselves that are always in some way present in consciousness. Therefore the more closely we are related to the other the more vigorous the sympathetic impression will be.

The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person. (T 2.1.11)

Thus, sympathy for Hume, is a sort of *emotional contagion* that we catch from others, a kind of resonance of our experienced self with theirs.

As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature (T 3.3.1).

Hume argues that because of our human likeness to each other, the idea of the passion of another leads us to think about ourselves. A recollection occurs of a memory of when we experienced such a passion and/or we remember our own vulnerability to it. This is in some ways similar to the argument for selfish passions that Hobbes put forward. However, unlike Hobbes' Leviathan form of social contract, for Hume it is sympathy or fellow feeling, which binds society together and generates social cohesion. However, although sympathy is aroused for friends and strangers, the stronger the relationship and likeness to the other, the more it is likely to resonate with the self. This tends to be understood in terms of blood ties and kinship, but he also discusses how people of similar temperament will be drawn together: 'that people of gay tempers naturally love the gay; as the serious bear an affection to the serious' (T 2.2.4). People of likeness then are drawn together in this way and can create factions which Hume remarks are some of 'the most visible, though less laudable effects of this social sympathy in human nature' (EPM. 5.2.35). Penelhum remarks on how Hume's 'deep hostility' towards the rationalist tradition of his time, 'is the result of its [rationalism] being a theoretical force that can only encourage self-distancing from the sources of emotional nourishment that make us what we are' (1993: 143).

## Kant's Synthetic *a priori*

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was a pivotal figure of the enlightenment. He is often quoted as stating that Hume woke him up from his 'dogmatic slumber' (PFM 4: 260) and is registered in the annals of philosophy for bringing together the two opposing epistemologies of rationalism and empiricism, which is often termed his Copernican revolution. We saw that Descartes and Spinoza argued for the importance of *a priori* knowledge (knowledge that is independent of experience, intrinsic to the human mind), such as mathematics or Plato's 'innate forms', as being the only reliable (true) knowledge that can be known. Reacting against this stream of self-contained rationalism were the empiricists who were predominantly from the British Isles. While the rationalists had downgraded the role of the senses in obtaining true knowledge, the empiricists,



such as Locke, Hume and Berkeley were more sceptical of the reliance on *a priori* knowledge such as mathematics. Mathematical formulations were argued by the empiricists as merely tautological: one plus one is simply a definition of two. In this way they argued that mathematics (the *a priori*) do not tell us anything about the world. Dixon notes that it was John Stuart Mill in 1859 who named the two schools of thought the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* schools (2003: 99). Logicians understand the difference between the two forms of knowing as the distinction between deductive (the *a priori*) and inductive reasoning (the *a posteriori*), and of course we have seen some of these philosophical debates mirrored in differences between Plato (the rationalist) and Aristotle (much more the empiricist).

Kant supposed that both the rationalist and the empiricist traditions overlook the fact that humans have fundamentally limited capacities in regard to what they can know with their minds and senses. Humans are constrained by a number of what Kant described as categories through which the mind works: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, possession, action and passivity. Human knowing is understood by Kant to be fundamentally limited by these categories, all that it presents of the world is a mere 'flawed representation' of a particular thing, which disallows one from apprehending the thing itself. What we can know about the world that comes through the senses then is what he called the *phenomenal* world and the way things are (in themselves) is what Kant called the *noumenal* world, that world is 'transcendental' and cannot be registered in human experience, it is beyond the grasp of the experiencing self, despite the efforts of the rationalists. The *noumenal* consists of metaphysical things such as universal law and free-will, which are not determinable by the physical world.

Kant had very particular beliefs about free will and the ability of humans to rise above the *phenomenal* world of nature and enter into the *noumenal* world through acts of free will; he believed it to be self-evident that we sometimes have free choices. If we didn't believe that we had free choices then we would never be able to apply praise and blame to others. It is through this free will that moral choices are made. This is where Kant provides a key link between the *noumenal* and *phenomenal* worlds in what he terms the synthetic a priori. If morality is real, Kant argues, then human freedom must also be real. In this sense humans are not only subject to the laws of the *phenomenal* but can also share in the *noumenal* world. So Kant argued that the 'human will' is subjected to two influences. Firstly, human beings have desires, inclinations and emotions which are related to their physical nature; for example, these may be desires to be happy. Secondly, as rational beings, humans have the ability to recognise the laws of freedom despite their desires, inclinations and emotions.

## The Rational Being

To illustrate this ability, Kant developed an ethical system concerned with rational decision-making practices that are devoid of emotion. Kant suggested in order to make good moral judgments our reasoning ought to be free from emotion.

Emotional responses were seen to represent the lower side of human nature and would simply hinder moral judgments; these judgments he proposed, would be far better if they were made through a state of pure reason. In order to act in this way one must become what Kant famously denoted as a 'rational being'. Rational beings will be, according to Kant, subject to an absolute moral law, this distinguishes them from other material things in the world which are subject to the laws of nature. Kant distinguishes physics, which is concerned with objects that are subject to the 'laws of nature' (the *phenomenal*) and ethics, which is concerned with objects that are subject to the 'laws of freedom' (the *noumenal*).

Kant suggested therefore that all rational beings who follow the laws of freedom will recognise the universal law of morality which he called the 'categorical imperative' in accordance with how they *ought* to act. Thus the imperative is a command to constrain the inclinations and emotions, to act objectively from reason. Kant's law of the categorical imperative stated that one should '*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law*' (MM, 4: 421). A maxim is a general principle according to which an individual acts; for example a maxim could be, 'I will steal items from my neighbour'. But one should only have a maxim if the person desires it to become a universal law; so, if you adopted the above maxim you would be willing to allow your neighbour to steal items from you. However, Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative included the maxim that no one should be treated simply as a *means* but as an *end* in themselves, in other words, the rights of others must be respected.

For Kant, human beings are only truly free if they are able to recognise the categorical imperative out of rational duty, rather than sentimental *inclination*. Moral worth can only be applied if acts are conducted through duty, by restraining the desire and emotion. For example, Frazer (2010) explains that Kant draws attention to two different kinds of philanthropists: one who is motivated by sympathetic inclinations, the other by duty. The former may act from benevolent feelings and perform what is considered to be a good deed. Kant suggests that such a person 'deserves praise and encouragement but not esteem, for the maxim lacks moral content, namely that of doing such actions not from inclination but *from duty*' (G 4:398). Kant supposes a person who may be shrouded in grief who lacks inclination to perform such moral actions and a person who may be born with very little capacity to be sympathetic towards others. People in these kinds of states who morally act purely from duty rather than sentimental emotion are of high moral worth.

## Sympathy's Infection

However, Frazer argues that the story that is typically told of Kant's understanding of emotion (as described above) fails to consider the influence that the sentimentalists

before him had on his theories of ethics. It is only in the later period of his life that he came to reject sentimentalism, before this he was very much camped within this tradition. Indeed Frazer argues that the above is often understood as Kant 'making a normative case against the sympathetic sentiments here or urging us to extirpate such soft feelings from our psyche' (2010: 115). But this is apparently not the case, Kant was concerned with free will, and he presumed desires and emotions, even if benevolent, are not under wilful control and so activity arising from them is not of moral worth. In other words, emotion and the like are reactions that are caused by a chain of events in the *phenomenal* world, while duty comes from the laws of freedom arising from the *noumenal*. Indeed Kant stated that 'evil consists in our will not to resist the inclinations when they invite transgressions' (RBR: 6:59, footnote). But that is not to say that Kant totally condemned moral acts that derived from the sentiments, indeed they can be instrumental in developing the good will, if the inclinations are towards morally right activity; but these cannot be the grounds of morality as they are unreliable. The morally determined will, however, should cultivate the inclinations (this notion is similar to Augustine's that we looked at in the previous chapter). This can occur through pitting contrary inclinations against each other, in this way the inclination against the moral law can be weakened.

Contemporary scholars are somewhat puzzled by this aspect of Kant's work as it seems to run against his categorical imperative to morally act through duty. Sherman (1990) and Frazer (2010) suggest that Kant uses inclination (or more specifically, sympathy) here as a kind of fall-back motivation for moral acts when the motive for duty fails, just so long as it is not necessary to do one's duty. Yet it is still quite difficult to square this, as if the motive for duty has failed then surely it does become necessary? Kant answers this through stating that it is the wisdom on nature's part to provide humans with sympathetic inclinations so that they 'could handle the reins provisionally, until reason has achieved the necessary strength' (APV 7:253). And yet he also states that although sympathy may alert one to, for example, help 'a man sitting in distress', but if a person can be of no practical help to the person in distress, Kant suggests that it is better to be like the Stoic, stating '[W]hat is it to me? My wishes cannot help him' (LE 27: 421). Sympathy in such a case, Kant stresses, would be useless, so it is better to be indifferent. He goes as far as to suggest that sympathy in such a case can actually be harmful, one then allows the self to be open to sympathy's infection: 'I let myself be infected by his pain (through my imagination) then two of us suffer, though the trouble really (in nature) affects only one' (MM 6: 457). Kant even goes as far as to suggest that sympathetic feelings, for others who claim to be in need, can be manipulated easily, particularly for those who are considered subject to overpowering sympathetic feelings. Again Kant uses the notion of the form of causation one can be subject to in the *phenomenal* world, to imply that the beneficiary then acts on pathological impulses rather than appealing to reason (Frazer, 2010: 127).

## Affects and Passions

Frazer suggests that it is important to distinguish between the two terms of ‘affects’ and ‘passions’ in Kant’s psychological writings.

Neither of these Kantian terms of art bears much of a relation to what we commonly call ‘affects’ or ‘passions’ in the English of the twenty first century, in the German of the eighteenth, or in any Western language before or since. To the contrary ... the turbulent experiences of sudden emotions that he calls ‘affects’ are more commonly termed passions in the Latin Christian traditions, while the calm and reflective phenomenon that Kant calls ‘passion’ is more commonly termed *affectus* or ‘affection.’ Perhaps this is why a distinction so central to Kant’s rejection of reflective sentimentalism has been so widely misunderstood. (2010: 128)

Of course the distinction that Frazer describes here would appear to be odd in the light of the discussed differences between *passion* and *affectus* of this and the previous chapter: *affectus* being of a higher order than passions according to the theological texts of the medieval period. Affects in Kant’s sense then are those feelings that tend to determine people to act in ways that disallow reflection. Kant suggests that skilled orators may elicit the affects of their audience ‘to move people like machines’ (CJ 5:328, footnote). In this way affects are rather like diseases which infect people and incapacitate them. It is rather difficult to see, however, how Kant supposes that one can avoid being affected by *affectus*; although he quotes Stoic *apatheia* as being ‘a sublime moral principle’ (APV 7:253). While the affects work in small but strong bursts, it seems that the passions, according to Kant, occur over a longer period. In this way passions allow for more reflection. For example, an affect may give way to a fit of anger, while the associated passion would give way to brooding, vindictiveness and hatred. Not only then do they differ to affects in relation to duration but also to the involvement of reason. This is where Frazer argues against the likes of Nussbaum who characterise Kant as portraying emotion (or in this case passion) as wholly impulsive, animalistic and non-cognitive. A passion for Kant ‘takes its time and reflects no matter how intense, to reach its end’ (APV 7:252).

## Social Passions

Importantly Frazer adds that passions do not arise only through the natural causal order but are social. Although there are ‘natural’ (innate) passions which Kant states are ‘the inclinations for freedom and sex’, he calls these ‘burning

passions (*passiones ardentes*). There are also a second order of passions which are socially constructed, which he calls ‘cold passions (*passiones frigidae*)’; these are ‘ambition, lust of power, and avarice, qualities which are not linked with vehement affectus but with the persistence of a maxim meant for a certain purpose’ (APV 7:267–8). Of course Kant here is suggesting that the social passions are linked to reason (a maxim) and not affect (vehement affectus) while the natural passions are only linked to affectus. However, it is worth noting that Kant suggests that they only *appear* or ‘seem’ to be tied to reason and are in fact ‘inclinations of delusion’:

Since passions are inclinations concerned merely with the possession of means, and since all inclinations have to be satisfied that concern this purpose directly, passions seem to manifest characteristics of reason. Particularly, passion appears to imitate the idea of a faculty which is closely linked with freedom, by which alone those purposes can be attained. Possessing the means to any desired ends, however, reaches much farther than the inclination directed at a single inclination and its satisfactions. Therefore they may also be called inclinations of delusion. The delusion consists in equalizing the mere opinion of someone regarding the value of a thing with the actual value of the thing. (APV 7:270)

## Conclusion

What we have attempted to draw out in this chapter are some of the nuanced ways that emotion and reason are theorised by the protagonists represented here. They are often presented in texts as developing theories as either fixed within the rationalists’ traditions, wherein reason is of primary epistemological importance, or in the case of the sentimentalists, as advocating the opposite. Of course this is the case, but only to a degree. The psychologies that each of these theorists develop allow for both forms of deliberation to play a part. For example, in both Descartes’ and Spinoza’s philosophies they advocate the primacy of reason but additionally stress the important role of ‘intellectual emotion’ and ‘*affectus*’ respectively. Even Kant, albeit ambivalently, discusses how some passions incorporate a rational element and indeed that sympathy could at times be used in moral reasoning. Additionally Hume’s account of associationism could be considered a form of reasoning, one which is integral to his psychological understanding of emotion.

These micro-psychology oriented conceptualisations of emotion also feed into their more socially aware macro views of structuration. We see Descartes concerned with the dynamic relation of developing the right forms of intelligent emotions that required social habituation. Similarly *conatus* for Spinoza requires

forms of socialisation in what can only be described as a form of behaviourism, wherein society should reward and punish socially acceptable and unacceptable desires. Hume of course saw emotion as ‘the’ central node in the structuring of human relations that make up society while Kant saw, to a large degree, nothing good coming out of a society that was ruled by emotion.

Many of the discourses that have come out of these philosophies are still prevalent today. That is not to say that they started in this era. Hopefully the reader will be able to see how these have been prevalent throughout the history of emotion studies but take on nuanced forms. For example, the ascent of mind over emotion is not something that started with Descartes nor did he completely advocate this. These forms of simplistic dichotomisations tend to get caught in discourse (language) and go on to inform subsequent thinking, conceptualisations, policies and everyday practices.

Many of the contemporary ethical systems that have developed are based within the Kantian tradition. The main governing bodies in psychology (e.g. APA, APS and BPS) either explicitly or implicitly adopt a Kantian perspective on ethics. These are rule-based systems otherwise known as deontological ethical systems. Yet there are contrary opinions that can be seen as stemming from sentimentalism. Of particular note are feminist critiques which put forward a *context-respectful approach*. Held states that rather than judging action through abstract rules, there should be more of a focus on ‘caring, empathy, feeling for others, being sensitive to each other’s feelings’. She adds that all these ‘may be better guides to what morality requires in actual contexts rather than abstract rules of reason, or rational calculation’ (1993: 223).

## FURTHER READING

Reading the primary sources of this epoch is a lot easier as the authors tended to write in the vernacular. As he was a native English speaker, Hume’s books, such as *A Treatise of Human Nature* and the *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, are extremely accessible and a joy to read. Although of course Descartes’ *Philosophical Works* have been translated into English as has Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (among his other works). To be more specific we would recommend the reading of either of Hume’s works (mentioned above), Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* and Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Kant’s writings are perhaps a bit more inaccessible. It is also worth noting here that some of the English translations of these works often lack precision. For example, we had some challenges attempting to distinguish what some translations were referring to when reading Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Translations sometimes use the term ‘emotion’ when Spinoza denotes the more nuanced terms of ‘affectus’ and ‘passion’. These have very important differences as can be seen in Kant’s rather controversial use of these terms.

Frazer, L.M. (2010) *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the moral sentiments in the eighteenth century and today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

As the title suggests, Frazer discusses in detail the development of sentimentalism. His analysis converges on Hume but looks at precursors and later developments. We have drawn in this chapter on some of his unique insights into Kant and his lesser known sentimentalist background. Frazer additionally looks at how sentimentalism has influenced the contemporary social sciences and political practice.

Prinz, J.J. (2007) *The Emotional Construction of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This is another good read that addresses arguments that flourished throughout the enlightenment period concerning moral decision making processes and emotion. Prinz offers some very good commentary on Hume's and Kant's ethics and offers some interesting insights of his own.