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On a Genealogy of the Emotions from a Rhetorical Perspective*

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review of: Daniel M. Gross (2006) *A Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Pp. ii + 200. £ 22.50/ US $ 35.00. ISBN-10: 0226309797; ISBN-13: 978-0226309798).

> The 'democratization of emotion' over the past two centuries or so is still incomplete at best and a model of distraction at worst (Gross, 2006: 5).
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> Rhetoric always represents the possibility that things might be otherwise (Gross, 2006: 15).
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> By telling the story of our psychophysiology of emotion and by showing at what cost it emerged, I hope to provide access once again to the rich rhetoric that still quietly shapes our emotional world for worse and for better (Gross, 2006: 20).
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> Who has (or not), who can (or not) have which emotions? When? Where? How? Under what conditions and constraints? And why?

Introduction: On the Surging and Exploding Interest in the Emotions

We have been witnessing in recent decades a renewed and substantial interest in the (study of) emotions from a variety of different and divergent perspectives. This surging and exploding interest obviously makes a long overdue correction to what had been an otherwise unquestioned status quo or neglect – in which the emotions only rarely, if at all, figured in their own right as serious and worthwhile objects of inquiry – philosophical, scientific, or otherwise, from a new and fresh perspective. It was not long ago that they were viewed essentially as 'climate-like internal events', as non-rational,

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discrete and inchoate interior 'states' which might or might not provide an environment for thought, and might somehow connect, incline, propel or shape thought in some directions. However, it was commonly assumed that emotions and thoughts, feelings and reason/rationality were contrastive terms. Whenever the emotions were mentioned, they were quickly dismissed or brushed aside in the same breath in favour of reason and rationality, the presumed distinctive and essential feature of human nature. Alternatively, and in line with age-old traditional perspectives going back to Plato and the Stoics, they were viewed as 'disruptive,' 'a kind of excess,' or invariably as a 'source of irrationality' to be tamed and controlled.

Nowadays however, hardly a week goes by in the academic world without reading or hearing about a colloquium, conference, or workshop being organized on one aspect or another, one approach or another, one theory or another of the emotions.[1] A quick search of the literature on the subject and related matters would quickly bring up hundreds and perhaps thousands of references. The sheer quantity of studies and inquiries within and across different fields (e.g., in literary studies, intellectual history, philosophy, anthropology, political theory and organization studies, psychology, not to mention the neurosciences) and even across different cultural and philosophical traditions[2] (e.g., East vs. West) certainly bodes well for the better understanding of the emotions and a more sophisticated appreciation of their place and role in our individual and collective lives. This dramatic surge in interest and attention does not of course preclude the persistence of certain widespread misconceptions based on questionable assumptions and methodologies. In other words, it does not guarantee that we will develop the proper and most useful conception, or even come to understand them fully in their diversity and complexity.

Daniel Gross's book (2006), is however a welcome and important new addition to the growing literature on the subject on emotions. It is an ambitious attempt to undertake *a genealogy of the emotions from a rhetorical perspective*. Its aims as its title indicates is to bring out a hidden, obscured or covered up history, stretching back from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*[3] through early and late Modern philosophy and literature to contemporary neurophysiology and political liberalism. He contends that it is bound to change our

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1 This week – as of the writing of this review, May 28, 2007 – and to mention only one instance, it has been announced that a one-day conference organized by the Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature will be held on June 1 at the University of Warwick on the theme 'Modernism and the Emotions'. As we shall see, this theme is squarely situated within the central concern of the book here under review, and its author would be, if I may suggest so, a good keynote speaker.

2 See McLemee, S. (2003) 'Getting Emotional', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 21, in which he points out that the study of emotions and feelings, once the province of psychology, is now spreading to history, literature, and many other fields. In the field of political theory and organization studies, see for example, Fineman, S. (ed.) (1995) *Emotion and Organization*. 2nd Edition. London: Sage; Hochschild, A. R. (1983) *The Managed Heart and the Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; see also the latest issue of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization,* 7(1), 2007, in which 'Immaterial and Affective Labour' is explored in the context of a presumably transformed capitalism with a concern for the possibility of resistance to Capital's global hegemony. For East/West comparisons, see Marks, J. and R. Ames (eds.) (1995) *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*. New York: SUNY Press.

3 Aristotle (1991) *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse,* trans. and ed. G.A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press.

misguided views, put to rest our misconceptions, and possibly point us in the right direction, or at least in a more fruitful and promising one. Rather than seeking to understand the emotions in their biological, psycho-physiological and evolutionary underpinning and significance, or in terms of their relationship to reason and rationality or cognition, we are better off focusing on their socio-historical-cultural construction. That is to say, on how the emotions are constructed differently at different times in history, differently for different individuals or groups, and in different social and cultural contexts.

I don't know how 'secret' is the history that Gross seeks to disclose. It seems to me that some inquirers were already in on it, at least in part, but perhaps not with the kind of deliberate focus and sustained critical assessment of its implications that Gross displays. My aim in this critical review is to bring out the main thrust of his analysis, situate it to some extent historically and philosophically with respect to other projects on the subject, and evaluate briefly its contribution.

Caveats and Preliminaries

First, however, it would be helpful to address a number of preliminary questions in order to take a measure of the motivating force behind his project.

'Why have 'emotions' emerged in recent times as a subject of importance in a diverse range of fields and traditions?' Could it be, at least in part, because our inquiries into their nature, their place and role promise access to a domain of 'proto-reason'? That is, to 'a different kind of reason' (perhaps as in Pascal's well-known statement "the heart has its reasons that Reason itself cannot comprehend"). Such a 'different kind of reason' is nowadays, we must admit, more widely recognized, and as a result, emotions are not viewed as necessarily or always the antithesis or antipode of reason and rationality – or even cognition-evaluation, and knowledge itself.

In this regard, it is worth noting the view defended by Nussbaum (2001),[4] according to which emotions have cognitive-evaluation dimensions as they are "suffused with intelligence and discernment," and somehow "contain in themselves an awareness of value or importance." This "awareness of value" means that ethical discourse must take account of the emotions; and that morality cannot be reduced to a system of principles to be grasped somehow by a detached intellect. Subsequently, a central part of articulating and developing an adequate ethical theory must consist in articulating and developing an adequate theory of the emotions.

Could it be, at least in part, because we would thereby gain a better understanding of what motivates and moves us aesthetically, morally, and politically? Such a domain was obviously obscured or viewed as somehow beyond access for most of our history, Gross believes, because of long and widely held dubious assumptions and questionable

4 Nussbaum, M. (2001) *Upheaval of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

methodologies which have been perpetuated well into modern and contemporary philosophy, science, the humanities at large and the human sciences in particular. He points for example to *rational-choice theory* in the latter area, and *linguistic analysis* in the former.

Surprisingly, very few scholars in either the human sciences or the humanities have adequately focused on *the rhetorical tradition* for insights into the emotions, and this despite the fact, duly noted by Gross, that "rhetoric was the first, and remains the richest, resource for such an inquiry" (p. 9).

'What does Gross mean by 'rhetoric(s)'? What advantages or benefits accrue to his approach from being thusly focused?' To paraphrase Cicero (in *De Oratore*), one could say that for Gross, 'rhetoric' is certainly an endeavor far broader and far richer than is commonly thought. It is sustained by all sorts of social, cultural, political considerations, institutional facts, discursive as well as non-discursive practices. And as such, it implies a broader and more comprehensive perspective that can only be achieved through a synthesis of some sort. Like other classical terms, it refers at least to a concrete practice, a theory, and a discursive quality. It is at once (a) an embedded cultural practice and (b) an inventive attitude, which enables us to reflect critically upon those very same cultural practices (p. 10). In its distinctly modern vein, it is critically reflexive with respect to its own historical situation, and can serve to characterize "how things might be otherwise" (p. 13). In other words, historical rhetorics reminds us that, however consequential and real they might be, the institutions and practices (discursive as well as non-discursive) that help shape us and, as Foucault would say,[5] constitute us as individuals, and as members of different communities, are ultimately of our own making, and therefore subject to un-making and change.

Generally speaking, then, one could say that rhetoric always represents the possibility that things might be otherwise – despite being embedded in relatively stable institutions and practices, at least for a time.[6] In Gross's view, it even carries with it the potential for *theory* and *education*. It is not surprising therefore that some philosophers interested in heeding Marx's injunction to transform the world (rather than merely continue to interpret it *ad nauseatum*) have stated, in a rather non-Marxian way, that we must begin by changing our language, the language in which we describe and talk about our world and ourselves. For Gross, "rhetoric is an inventive attitude toward language and the world, where 'emotion' names one important way in which language and the world connect" (p. 15). In this sense, it is diametrically opposed to the entire philosophical tradition that posits language as a *mirror* of nature – to use an expression from the title of Rorty's groundbreaking book (1979).[7]

'What does Gross mean by 'emotions'? Is his working definition tenable?' For Gross, emotions are best understood as defining "the contours of a dynamic social field

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5 Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Random House.

6 See relevant discussions of the contributions of Nicholas Caussin (1619) and Giambattista Vico (1725) (pp. 11-15).

7 Rorty, R. (1979) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

manifest in what is experienced or obliterated, imagined and forgotten, praised and blamed, sanctioned or silenced, etc" (p. 15). Though they are obviously materialized in brains, faces, bodies, and even objects and architecture (e.g., tombstones, amusement parks), emotions clearly exceed the merely ideal. But neither are they essentially material, he believes. Instead, taking his cues from Heidegger's commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, he contends, quite rightly, I believe, that the most appropriate way to approach emotions is phenomenologically – that is, by starting with the concrete manifestations of emotions *in a meaningful world*, as opposed to a world of mere matter.[8] In such an endeavour, Gross claims, rhetorics would obviously come to occupy a leading place, over and beyond the practices of the 'hard sciences' that are focused on matter and biology.

'Is "emotion" however a coherent or useful category?' For one thing, we must recognize that 'fear', for example, differs from 'jealousy' not only in terms of its physiology, its place in evolutionary biology, but in terms of its purpose. For another, the term may contribute to obscuring particular histories of particular emotions, such as shame, guilt, melancholy, love, humility, apathy, pride, etc. Gross is aware of some important and relatively strong arguments to this effect (by literary and cultural historians as well as neuroscientists), but he chooses to disregard them and use anyway the generic term of 'emotion' (and its relative, 'passion') primarily in contrast with reason.[9] As he notes (2n2), he uses the terms 'emotion' and 'passion' without invoking a strict distinction. However, the more familiar term 'emotion' signals in general a contemporary perspective, while that of 'passion' indicates a more historical and antiquated perspective, or alternatively, vehemence and excessiveness in the expression of one's emotions. In his discussion of the 'emotion-reason *topos'* (pp. 55-65), Gross argues that giving up the broad category of 'emotions' completely would make some important theoretical work and even some historical work impossible. He may be right in this regard – despite the well-taken points raised previously.

On the Emotions from a Rhetorical Perspective – Main Thrust of the Argument

As mentioned earlier, Gross's genealogical-historical approach to the 'emotions' is anchored in rhetorics (his primary field of interest, training and expertise), and as such, it puts *the question of politics* (and therefore of *power*) at the forefront and squarely at the centre of his inquiry (p. 6). In so doing, it purports to remedy a deficit diagnosed in both the humanities and the human sciences that has so far been left unanswered in his view.

For this purpose, he seeks to reconstitute by way of a critical intellectual history a deeply nuanced, rhetorical understanding of emotions that he claims prevailed prior to the triumph and dominance of the psycho-physiological understanding and the liberal,

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8 See Gross, D. and A. Kemmann (eds.) (2005) *Heidegger and Rhetoric*. Albany: SUNY Press.

9 As we shall see in due course, this will enable us to situate his inquiry within the contemporary context of research and investigation, construed in a broader and more general way.

humanist and universalist approach. He also wishes to show by way of literary and philosophical examples how this rhetorical perspective can help us read anew "the emotional complex of modernity" – whether early or late. In this sense, Gross's genealogy of the emotions constitutes in the final analysis a new *critique of modernity*, one that is bound to be enlightening and instructive for our *postmodernity*.

According to the story that Gross tells us, the Aristotelian political rhetoric on the emotions, which he believes to be on the right track for the most part, was rediscovered by early Modern authors in the 17th century (e.g., Hobbes). He locates the heyday of the explicit recognition of emotions as fundamentally psycho-social in the mid-17th century, and claims that a dramatic new possibility opened up for it when the ancient discipline of 'rhetorics' was adopted in Early modernity. It was in fact pursued later in different ways by different late Modern authors in the 18th century (e.g., Hume, Sarah Fielding, William Perfect, and Adam Smith). However, these authors' contributions have often been misinterpreted in the direction of a moral universalism and generalized psychology, and were subsequently lost again in the 19th century, during which rhetoric was largely reduced to the study of figures and tropes, or the art of persuasion. As a result, emotions (such as anger, apathy, vainglory, pride, humility, and compassion) that were once overtly rhetorical, socially construed and constructed, and therefore political, are now construed as natural, equally shared, and somehow best explained in psycho-physiological terms. This is the belief that has obviously come to dominate in the 20th century up to the present. And we have tended to read back such a belief into (late) Modern texts. The emotions, that once were treated as externalized forms of socio-political currency and worldly investments that are always already caught up in a given socio-historical-political matrix characterized by social differences, differential powers, and uneven distribution (i.e., 'emotional injustice'), have been sucked into the brain and have come to be seen as hardwired to the human nature we all share equally.

The main targets of his criticism include: (1) the reductive psycho-physiological emotional Cartesianism which has come to inform both [a] romantic expressivism and [b] latter-day sciences of the mind and brain; (2) liberal humanist theories of emotions and of universal human dignity (e.g., those of Richard Sorabji,[10] Martha Nussbaum), as well as (3) neuro-scientific theories such as Joseph LeDoux's[11] and Antonio Damasio's[12] – to mention only two of the most prominent today. While the former is, as he shows, clearly situated within the problematic Cartesian framework, Gross argues that the latter is in fact also still trapped in a reductive neuro-physiological framework. And this, despite his diagnosis of *Descartes' Error* and explicitly looking up to Spinoza for an answer as to how to best characterize the mind-body relationship, or the nature, place and role of 'emotions' (or 'passions') in our mental, rational or social life.

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10 Sorabji, R. (2000) *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

11 LeDoux, J. (1996) *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

12 Damasio, A. (1999) *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. New York: Harcourt; Damasio, A. (2000) *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain.* New York: Quill/HarperCollins. Damasio, A. (2003) *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. New York: Harcourt.

For Gross, emotions are not simply constituted in the biology, nor even in the liberal humanist notion of human dignity all humans are supposed to share equally, but rather in relationships of inequity and differences in power. Following Aristotle's view, Gross contends that the emotions (including those that are more obviously social such as 'love' and 'jealousy' and those that are supposed to be hardwired such as 'fear' and 'disgust') require "a series of enabling conditions," which are commonly obscured by our widespread and all-too-often unquestioned platitudes about biology and universal human dignity. These include: (a) *a public stage* – rather than private feelings, (b) *asymmetrical power relations*, (c) thoroughly *psychosocial presumptions* – rather than our familiar psychological, individual expressions of feelings. In other words, an emotion is not merely or most crucially the expression of an individual's opinion, as the Stoics and some contemporary philosophers have argued. And finally, it presumes (d) a *contoured world of emotional investments* where some people have significantly more liabilities (or opportunities) than others (p. 2-3).

Gross argues in effect that the contours of our emotional world have been shaped by social practices and institutions that simply afford some people greater emotional range than others; and as such, they have nothing to do with the inherent value or dignity of each human being and everything to do with the "technologies of social recognition and blindness" (p. 4). In a way that is clearly reminiscent of Foucault once again (1988),[13] he states that one of his aims is to study how these 'technologies of emotion' work.

In his view, the last point above (d) can serve to establish a direct link from Aristotle to early Modern psychologists, such as Hobbes, late Modern authors such as Hume, Sarah Fielding, William Perfect, Adam Smith, and even all the way to a contemporary philosopher such as Judith Butler. He recognizes, however, that brilliant tough they were, Aristotelian rhetoric and Hume's elitist theory of emotions, for example, were not 'right' in some metaphysical sense. Nevertheless, they have characterized the emotions in terms of a '*political economy*' based on '*scarcity*' rather than '*excess*', and marked fundamentally by an uneven distribution. In so doing, he claims, they did provide us with a lucid critique of power that reminds us that "the democratization of emotion" (p. 5) over the past two centuries or so is still incomplete at best, and distracting at worst.

For this reason, Gross undertakes to look at the rhetoric of uneven distribution in a number of cases, stretching from Ancient times to the Enlightenment and beyond. These cases include: Aristotle's angry King or apathetic slave, Seneca's angry tyrant, Hobbes' vainglorious and resentful preacher (chapters 1 and 2), the 'shadow economy' of apathy, passivity, and humility during the English Civil War now characterized in terms of a radicalized later Modern *active/passive* dyad, masculine political agency vs. a diminished femininity (chapter 3), Hume's proud property owner or humble woman, Sarah Fielding's humble hero (chapter 4), William Perfect's insane and emotionally troubled patients, and Adam Smith's compassionate spectator (chapter 5). He hopes thereby to recover a critical tool that has been obscured by the science of emotion, and that, he believes, is still underdeveloped in literary and cultural studies.

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13 Foucault, M. (1988) *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with M. Foucault*, ed. L.H. Martin, H. Gutman and P.H. Hutton. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

As suggested earlier, and by his own admission, Gross's approach bears some obvious affinities to the genealogical work of Foucault (1980).[14] But it also seeks to extend it and go beyond – by showing how early Modern theories of emotions in the Aristotelian vein (esp., Hume's) can inform Judith Butler's project (1997) seeking to integrate politics and psychoanalysis in an effort, as he puts it, "to think a theory of *power* together with a theory of the *psyche*" (p. 7).[15]

Consequences of a Genealogical Approach

What conclusions or lessons does Gross draw in the end from his genealogical-historical analysis? Though Aristotle and like-minded psychologists of early Modernity (17th century), such as Hobbes and Hume, have demonstrated how emotions are strategic, always already caught up in a differentiated socio-political-cultural context, they have all failed (except for Sarah Fielding) to theorize properly how emotions can be turned against the powerful. Nevertheless, he contends that their unblinking critique of power has made this last step much easier.

For one thing, he argues, Hume's theory for example can help us do what Judith Butler's project (1997) urges, namely, as I pointed out above, "to think a theory of power together with a theory of the psyche," and inform thereby "our most suggestive psychoanalytic theory of emotion." In Gross's view, both Hume and Butler challenge the notion of "autonomous free-will" and "psychological universalism." They ask instead "what losses are compelled by culturally prevalent prohibitions (notably for Hume, *patriarchy*, and for Butler, *hetero-normativity*) and what culturally prevalent forms of psyche result" (p. 7). How does this affect undoubtedly the emotional life of individuals and communities?

In any case, Gross believes that the work of modern rhetoricians makes it much easier to take the last desirable step than the alternative and competing approaches: those of the brain sciences as well as those of "liberal, humanist, universalist theories of human dignity." In both cases, he detects an "evasion of rhetoric" that calls for a deconstructive approach. That is why he subjects the work of Antonio Damasio (as a prominent representative of the former approach) and that of Martha Nussbaum (prominent representative of the latter approach) to a severe, and possibly at times unfair and excessive, deconstructive critique.

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14 Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.

15 Butler, J. (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power*: *Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 19. In this regard, Gross remarks that "instead of contrasting psychic phenomena that are internal, personal, and physiological to political phenomena that are external, impersonal, and social, Butler asks us to consider how particular processes of internalization fabricate 'the distinction between interior and exterior life'. Reinvesting a Foucauldian analysis of power with psychoanalytic questions about *how we come to desire our own oppression,* Butler interrogates the mechanisms of law and language that regulate our passionate attachments" (2006: 78; italics added).

Against the theory of emotions proposed by Damasio (2003),[16] his critique consists in pointing out the "evasion of rhetoric" that somehow writes itself into his scientific research, and the subsequent neglect of the irreducibility of the social and cultural dimensions of the emotions. He objects to the reductionism of his psycho-physiological approach. More specifically, he objects to his questionable experimental assumptions, the dubious presumptions he makes about the social in its relation to the natural or the biological, about the ability of the neuro-physiological sciences to address in a satisfactory manner irreducibly social and cultural phenomena such as 'ethnic hatred', 'gay pride', or 'the anger of the white male', for example. Gross does not share Damasio's optimism in seeing someday anti-social emotions disappear like a tailbone. More specifically, he is not sure how Damasio can overcome what he calls "the paradox of the observer": "How can one adequately characterize an abnormal emotional brain when one's study might be designed within *a sick culture* or at least in a culture affected by *maladaptive biases* inherently unidentifiable and therefore uncontrollable from within the scientific study?" (p. 37; italics added).

Gross recognizes various merits to Nussbaum's approach (2001). She breaks up the traditional dichotomy emotions vs. reason, defends the intelligence of the emotions, underscores the social, cultural and even political dimensions of the emotions as well as the necessity of taking a narrative approach to the emotions and enlisting the help of literature for better understanding how they operate in particular lives, our own and other peoples' lives. In the end however, he believes that she somehow missed an opportunity. In his view, such a failure is also due to "an evasion of rhetoric" in the liberal, humanist and universalist theory she favors and upholds, and that she believes could perhaps be supported and validated in some fashion by the results of the latest scientific results in the neuro-sciences. In other words, it seems to be still committed to questionable (metaphysical and scientistic) assumptions about human nature, human beings, and what 'human flourishing' entails from the standpoint of 'emotional justice'.

Historical and Philosophical Context

Let us now take a few steps back and try to situate the approach exemplified by Gross within a broader and more general framework. We might ask for example: 'How have the class of mental states commonly referred to as 'emotions' generally figured in philosophical inquiries in the past and in more recent times?' The story we could tell in response to such a question can obviously be told in several ways. Here are at least two.

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16 See McGinn, C. (2003) 'Fear Factor', *New York Times*, February 23, for a devastating internal critique of the central claims made and defended by Antonio Damasio in support of a theory of emotions which he claims to be radically new. McGinn contends that in fact it is merely "old wine in a new bottle," and therefore unoriginal, and what's worse, outright false and therefore untenable. According to McGinn, one can easily show how to refute such a theory. It represents a standard chestnut of psychology textbooks, a staple of old-style behaviorist psychology, with its emphasis on outer behavior at the expense of inner feeling. It is also known as the James-Lange theory, for having been developed independently by two psychologists in the 1880's, William James and Carl G. Lange.

(1) One consists in looking at the philosophical history of the *emotions* in terms of the relation they (are said to) have enjoyed, over the course of the past two thousand years or so, with *reason* or *rationality* itself. From this perspective, we might say that emotions have appeared in philosophical inquiries primarily in terms of their ability to influence and affect (mostly negatively) our ability to reason and be rational.

Thus, for the Stoics (and many other ancients and modern philosophers) for whom philosophy is primarily or even exclusively an exercise in rational deliberation, the aim is to overcome the detrimental and disruptive effects of the emotions. For Hume, however, reason has been shown to be powerless in motivating moral behaviour, and only our passions or sentiments are capable of motivating us to right and wrong action. More recently in time, the logical positivists' 'emotivism' in value theory led to the dismissal of moral and aesthetic statements as meaningless, or as unable to be scrutinized by traditional rational decision-procedures because they were merely expressions of emotions. In this whole line of philosophical inquiry, the focus (and its most notable feature) is on the power the emotions can have over our rational thought processes and vice-versa. The examination of the emotions-rationality relation seems to have been centered around the question of determining 'who is in charge?' so to speak, – the emotions or reason? Despite, or perhaps in contradistinction to Hume's famous argument that 'reason' is in fact more accurately viewed as 'the slave of the passions', the philosophical tradition has for the most part had a tendency to view the emotions as the more hostile and disruptive part of the 'master-slave' relationship. Though in this regard, Gross would most likely take side with Hume, he would not, I believe, uphold the view that 'emotions' and 'reason' are necessarily antithetical, and that the former are devoid of cognitive-intentional-evaluative dimensions.

(2) An alternative way of telling the story of the emotions-rationality relation, which has been developed in more recent times, starts from a question about (the best way to characterize) the nature of emotions, rather than persisting in the examination of the dominance relationship one is said or presumed to have over the other.

The dramatically increased and exploding interest in the emotions over the last three decades or so can perhaps be explained, at least in part, on the basis of the following considerations. The focus of this approach is on the *cognitive* base of the emotions, and the scepticism it entertains about the idea that reason (or rationality) alone is the source of knowledge and understanding, and that the emotions simply motivate. The idea that 'reason' and 'emotions' are not to be conceived as always antagonistic and somehow working against each other (a conception sometimes referred to as 'the myth of the passions' or 'Descartes' error') but rather as interacting and perhaps even complimentary, is not in fact entirely new or original. We find as far back as in Aristotle's work that the distinction between rationality and the emotions is not invariably as heavily underscored as in many other, more antagonistically oriented, later accounts – esp. after Descartes. What is distinctive and noteworthy about recent approaches, however, is not merely an insistence on the need for a revisionary account of the emotions-reason relation away from the inherently hostile, disruptive, and antagonistic one, but an emphasis on the possibility of combining the *affective* and the *cognitive* aspects of emotions themselves.

On this question, we can distinguish at least three different approaches. First, there is the one (discussed earlier) endorsed and adopted by empirical psychologists, which is based on William James' idea that 'emotions are (bodily) feelings', and as such, they are not under our rational control. Second, there is the approach developed principally by Robert C. Solomon (1993)[17] and Martha Nussbaum (2001), according to which "emotions are appraisals or value judgments", which are not always misguided ones as earlier philosophers had us believe. They may even have cognitive-intentional-evaluative dimensions, and are best apprehended through a narrative articulation. Third, there is the approach, exemplified by Peter Goldie (2000),[18] which has received much attention from the philosophical community lately, and for which 'emotions are complex'. According to the latter approach, what we need is to retain a theory of the emotions that allows them to be rationally assessed, yet does not ignore the fact that they also involve feelings. In effect, it seems to be interested in finding a way to reconcile the two previous approaches in some plausible sense.

In this context, Gross's work can be situated along the axis taken by Solomon and Nussbaum, but with some crucial qualifications. Concerning the former, Gross acknowledges that his approach does overlap with Robert C. Solomon's influential work on emotion as constitutive of experience, but it diverges from his cognitive perspective that collapses at crucial points into a kind of *decisionism* that forecloses adequate historical and political analysis of emotions. For Gross, Solomon addresses the right topic but in the wrong way. He contends more specifically that Solomon's perspective obscures the *social* institutions of 'judgment' built into the legal system, for instance, which dramatically constrain individual decisions about all sort of matters, including, for example, matters of equality and inequality (3n3).

Concerning Nussbaum, as I pointed earlier, what Gross basically objects to is her 'evasion of rhetoric', and the subsequent 'missed opportunity' she had to elaborate an ethical-political theory worthy of the literary sensibility and political sensitivity that she displays otherwise in her work. Such a theory would focus our attention onto the social, cultural and political context of emotions – i.e., onto 'the politics of emotions'. In addition, he also objects to her excessive and at times uncritical endorsement and adoption of the universalist assumptions of liberal humanism, as well as those of the scientific and reductionist approach of neuro-physiologists, such as Damasio. As Gross points out: "In fact, Damasio's main purpose in *Looking for Spinoza* is to show how 'an understanding of the neurobiology of emotion and feeling is a key to the formulation of principles and policies capable of reducing human distress and enhancing (to cite Nussbaum) human flourishing.'" And he adds further: "Despite Damasio's poetic sensibility and good intentions, one shudders to imagine what such a society might look like" (p. 35).

In all fairness however, perhaps a more judicious, though not uncritical, appraisal of Nussbaum's contribution might be in order. The classical Greek version of cognitivism is one in which emotions somehow ascribe to things and people outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own existence and flourishing. For

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17 Solomon, R.C. (1993) *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life.* Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.

18 Goldie, P. (2000) *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, the neo-Stoic, cognitivist theorist of emotions, in contrast, they are best approached from a narrative point of view because they are *eudaimonistic* in character. They take their cues from the person's conception of flourishing, and this includes her scheme of ends, plans, and goals, and so on. And as such, they require a narrative articulation – so too does the person's history of attachment and commitments to others, values, and the world of objects in general. Nussbaum seeks in fact to amend and elaborate the classical Greek picture sketched out above in many ways. She want for example to provide a detailed account of the role of *imagination* in various emotions, to distinguish between emotions and cognate phenomena such as *moods*, *appetites*, and *motives for action*, as well as between general and particular emotions, on the one hand, and between 'situational' and 'background' emotions, on the other.

As in all her work, the civic dimension is critical, and her neo-Stoic account proposes a rich reciprocal relationship between agents and the powerful forces of "social construction" that provide and make possible certain *repertoires of emotion* in a given culture. Nussbaum wants to be able to account for variations in these repertoires across cultures, and show how certain developmental patterns in agents' histories might predispose them to normative civic emotions like compassion (as in Adam Smith), to forms of ambivalence, to asocial or anti-social emotional orientations. When and where dispositions and emotions are distorted, disordered, and undermined by ambivalence, or lack of appropriate social attunement, some sort of 'therapy' may offer us hope. Since the emotions are constitutively evaluative, they are opportunities to re-align individual evaluations, and thus emotions, with rational social norms. Nussbaum's *eudaimonism* is Aristotelian in its attempt to align personal flourishing with civic virtue. And in this sense, if anything, it should have agreed with the political view defended by Gross.

Besides, in her effort to characterize emotions as having rich cognitive-intentional content, as being (always/often/ more often than assumed) 'about' something rather than self-sufficient events, she shows that their 'aboutness' is mediated and articulated by the (constituted and possibly self-constituted) subjectivity of the individual concerned. She thus tries to introduce a richly subjective intentional component into the cognitivist approach. We can easily read her numerous evocations of her own 'grief' (at the death of her mother) as a kind of (autobiographical) phenomenology of the emotions. And again, in this sense, Gross should have seen in her approach a more kindred perspective.

Finally, with regards her presumed 'evasion of rhetoric', the following must be noted. When she considers how different literary genres – including tragedy, romance, melodrama, the realist novel, and some types of comedy – can only function through rich eudaimonistic connections to their audience, she approaches various texts through a version of Boothian rhetorical analysis. Such a rhetorical analysis is one that focuses on readerly emotional responses to characters, to the implied author, and to the reader's emotions toward her own possibilities. Once more, Gross's criticism in this regard may be too strong and in need of further qualification.

In the Final Analysis

Nevertheless, Gross does have a valid point in seeking to undermine the undisputed and widely accepted, yet problematic universalist and humanist assumptions built into a number of approaches to the emotions. For this purpose, he emphasizes the social constructivist approach – grounded in rhetorics – that he favours, and that I have briefly characterized above. However, he seems at times to go perhaps a bit too far in his indictment and rejection of those approaches generally grounded in contrast either in biology or in liberal humanism.

It should be clear to anyone who cares to make such assessment that the emotions must be apprehended in their complexity, in their various dimensions and from a variety of judiciously articulated perspectives. These would include: the social, cultural, historical, biological perspectives, as well as that which is, more properly speaking, political, and which could be articulated from the standpoint of a universalist, normative conception of 'emotional justice'. The political goals that his approach can help us achieve can also be advanced in some other ways or rendered easier to attain by the potentially illuminating theories of emotions that could be put forth by both scientists and liberal humanists of different stripes and persuasions, whose work is underwritten by a normative, moral, universalist thrust. Our study of the emotions is bound to be advanced further by a broadly construed multi-disciplinary effort.

In the end, however, one must recognize Gross's remarkable achievement – both in terms of the economy of language he displays and the scope of his argumentative thrust throughout his relatively small book comprising only five short and tightly woven chapters. His main argument is complex, weaving as it does several threads covering a long period of Western history, and taking aim at the respective construal of the emotions of several prominent protagonists (ancient, modern and contemporary) in a fairly succinct yet effective way. His text is judiciously referenced, and suggests a strong and nuanced command of the relevant literature. It is dense and qualified, and yet, it remains fairly easy to read. Its plot and structure, mirroring that of a good detective story, makes it even a page-turner, something that can hardly be said about most academic works today.

Gross is essentially raising the following crucial set of questions: 'Who has (or not), who can have (or not) which emotion(s)? When? Where? How? Under what conditions and constraints? And why?' In so doing, he is inviting us to consider why emotions are best understood as social phenomena through and through, over and beyond their psycho-physiological and biological underpinnings. He is also considering how things might be otherwise, or different from a rhetorical, and therefore political, point of view, and finally how the distribution of emotions could be done more judiciously with a little more equity. Though I am generally sceptical of works that propose to reveal a secret, I believe that his book brings out effectively a history that has been obscured and lost, and which therefore deserves our attention.

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