

To be a philosopher is to be a licensed poacher. We like to think about things we don't own. In the twenty-five years since writing *The Rationality of Emotion*, I have learned, though never enough, from philosophers and also psychologists, brain scientists, students of literature, and others. I kept wanting to write about things unconnected with either rationality or emotion; but somehow, like cheerfulness, both kept breaking back in. Part of the result is in the seventeen chapters of this book. Most of them began as talks that became essays, and they address a range of topics. But all are bound together by one central preoccupation: how best to understand how our lives turn around the pivot of our passions? Our passions are the source of all meaning. They also have their root in our selves—what biology, sociality, and the particularity of our own lives have made us. And we want them to be more than a mere projection of self, precisely because they are so important. We want them to be correct, or adequate, or *true*. (I chose and have stubbornly clung to that word, 'true', despite convincing almost no one. It alone connotes the breadth and complexity of the kinds of "rightness" I seek to explore.) And when we look for standards on which to ground our judgments, we find nothing but dusty mythologies, erected by ingenious archeologists of philosophy looking for Foundations. So to complete that circle we return to the same emotions that we are so strenuously hoping to try against some independent standard. We go out into the world to test them, and come back to find them staring at us quizzically: where did we think we were going? *There is only us passions*, they seem to say, *and you just have to find a circle large enough to hold us all*.

The chapters that began as independent essays have all undergone revisions: some minor, and a few enough to make them unrecognizable. Most of them particularly those in parts II and III, retain sufficient autonomy to be read independently. Some readers, like me, dislike having to

read a book *straight through*. To any such reader I say, pick at will. Such reading is encouraged. In fact, starting from the back of the book and rambling back would make a good itinerary, as the chapters in parts III and IV may be easier to read and can better stand on their own than those in parts I and II. For readers who prefer to graze, and for those who don't, I have inserted a few explanatory boxes that provide quick reminders, or primers, on a few recurring topics. A summary also heads each chapter, so the reader can know what to disagree with without the bother of reading the chapter.

That said, starting from the beginning and reading on is recommended. Chapter 1 sets up a number of puzzles about our stubborn inclination to judge emotions as reasonable or unreasonable, despite our remarkable inability to provide convincing rationales for such appraisals. This chapter is meant to motivate the quest for plausible criteria. That quest occupies the next three chapters, which together are intended to set out a theoretical landscape—I won't venture to say *basis*—for the approach taken to the topics of the later chapters. Hence these three may perhaps be mildly more “technical” than later chapters. Chapter 2 begins by sampling the bewildering variety of approaches philosophers and psychologists have taken to emotions, with particular attention to the issue of “cognitivism.” On this issue the pendulum has swung both ways several times in the history of philosophy. Cognitivism had a few decades of hegemony, but has recently found itself under attack. I try to suggest that peace is at hand, and that the insights of both sides clash less than is implied by the tone of some debates. Chapter 3 risks a fresh approach to the topic of truth, in which I commend the insights of kindergarten as having much to teach us about the role of correspondence in our understanding of truth. On that basis, I construct a concept of “generic truth” that makes room for assessments of emotions and desires as true or false. Standard cases of truth, applicable only to propositions or derivatively to beliefs,

are a species of the genus of true intentional states. They meet the conditions for generic truth, but in addition are structured in terms of digital representation. A concept of truth implies criteria of consistency; and one of the difficulties about calling emotions true or false is that emotional consistency does not seem to be regulated by any obvious principles. That problem is addressed in chapter 4, in which I try to clarify the extension of notions of consistency to desires and emotions, and show how, in the case of emotions, issues of truth, rationality, and authenticity are deeply entangled.

Part II focuses on the involvement of emotions in values, both aesthetic and moral. The four chapters in this part stem from essays written over about fifteen years, and they reflect an increasingly skeptical, not to say jaundiced, view of the commonly debated questions in metaethics. As a group, these four chapters express two convictions: first, emotions are both judge and party, both apprehensions of values and targets of appraisals; second, although the values they create or reveal can be forcibly projected onto a one-dimensional scale of preferences, a true picture of the domain of value must recognize their deep plurality. The first thesis is broached in chapter 5 by way of a detour through the quest for Human Nature. The influence of Aristotle on ethics has been particularly strong in recent years, with many swearing fealty to “virtue ethics.” I am as keen as the next classically trained philosopher to proclaim my love of Aristotle, but I think we need to acknowledge that Aristotle’s approach to the relation of nature to value is hopelessly bankrupt. At least, it is if it carries any whiff of the old Natural Law theories that claim to be in Aristotle’s debt. The reason is simply that there is, after Darwin, no hope of constructing a coherent concept of Human Nature on which we might base a set of moral imperatives. Our passions are there, however, and they can take over the job of creating human nature as we go. There’s plenty of creating left to do; in particular, in respect of the range of

emotional experiences available to us. Chapter 6 contends that a vast space of potential emotions has remained relatively unexplored, not only in philosophy and science, but in the lives of most individuals. The cause is in the salience of our emotions' practical implications. Their undeniable functional importance lies in setting us up for quick and effective responses to routine predicaments of life. But concentration on those virtues of emotion has caused scientists and philosophers to neglect emotional experience as such. I urge the adoption of a point of view on our emotional life inspired by the aesthetic rather than what is traditionally thought of as "moral." To do justice to that aspect, I propose to adopt a perspective I call axiological holism, which recognizes an admittedly curious notion of *valence free value*. By that apparent oxymoron I mean simply this: we can prize an experience, without needing to rank on a scale of desirability any action-tendency to which that experience might be linked.

The burden of chapters 7 and 8 is that emotions are, in fact, the ultimate arbiters of the moral domain itself. That domain--I contend, against what we are all taught in school--should not be regarded as automatically trumping all others. In making this argument, Chapter 8 is the more brief, brash, and perhaps rash. It more explicitly reflects the influence of two congenial and parallel bodies of research that have transformed philosophical anthropology and psychology in the last few decades. One is the development of serious attempts to understand the genesis of morality in evolutionary terms; the other, in the same spirit of naturalism, looks at the precursors of our emotional dispositions among those of our mammalian cousins, and particularly other primates, that exhibit a high level of sociality.

Parts III and IV look at a variety of specific contexts in which we apply emotions to normative standards, or normative standards to emotions, or both. Chapter 9 displays a number of sometimes curious ways that feelings are surprisingly vital to the very mechanisms of

inference and reasoning. In chapter 10, the intractable temptation to arrive at rational evaluations of emotional attitudes is illustrated by the question of the “correct” attitude to death. (There isn’t one, if you like your punch line first.) Chapter 11 raises the question of whether the value we place on art depends in any way on its biological function. While the empirical question isn’t closed, it would be silly to declare the unimportance of art if it is merely a side-effect of other adaptations, or even, for that matter, a chance consequence of genetic drift. Indeed, I am tempted to diagnose, in those who insist that anything we deeply care about must be adaptive, a deplorable addiction to the idea that ‘nature’ is the modern name for Providence. Chapter 12 veers from visual art to literature, regarded as an exploration of both the real and the possible. My message here is that the possible lives inside the actual. (And vice versa, of course, but that no one doubts.) Imaginative literature could help us to understand both our own and others’ responses in real life, but there are some tricky logical and psychological reasons why that does not work as smoothly as one might hope.

Part IV is about what makes for the good life, and the difficulties put in the path of its pursuit by the very makeup of our emotional equipment. Chapter 13 exhibits the multiple levels at which the nature of desire is pervaded by luck, and argues that in the most important affairs of life, what we really want to get is what we didn’t want. (Really.) Chapter 14 pursues this idea along a different tack. After frankly admitting that I personally lack the depressive temperament to which my convictions should entitle me, I try to show how the very structure of the concept of happiness makes it (insolently flouting the U.S. Constitution) unfit to be pursued. Chapter 15 returns to the potential variety of emotional experience, to deplore the slavish subjection of individual relationships to norms of nomenclature. I go into more detail there on the mechanisms that screen off our ability to respond aesthetically to the reality of individual encounters. Thus

the chapter is both an elaboration and a specific application of the plea in part II for an expansion of the aesthetic sensibility to the reality of practical life. Chapter 16 takes, as it were, the counterpoint of that position: arguing, in the name of the very same primacy of the aesthetic, that the inherent incoherence of the requirements for “romantic love” can be exploited to construct a valuable and emotionally satisfying, if somewhat conventional, episode of erotic theater. Finally, in chapter 17, I look at the dynamic tension between the attraction of novelty and the seduction of repetition, poised ambivalently between comfort and tedium. Rhythm—repetition and novelty—is ubiquitous in the natural world and at every level of nature, from celestial bodies to cellular clocks. In the realm of emotions, this returns us to a perennial problem: how to enhance the power of paradigm scenarios to lend meaning to present experience without screening off that very experience. In this last chapter, I also try once more to explain why both art and therapy offer a plausible but limited prospect of overcoming the limitations of our capacity for emotional truth.

It always seems slightly presumptuous, not to mention pathetic, to condemn one more tree just to pile one more book onto the unwieldy heap weighing down the collective bookshelf. I am also all too aware of the amount of work by others that I have neglected. My hope is that this partial perspective frames a picture worth looking at and thinking about. What follows are a few colored stones looking for their place in the collective mosaic.