Emotional Consistency

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that we experience some sets of emotions as inconsistent. But does this mean they are merely incompatible, in the sense that they cannot, or cannot whole-heartedly, coexist in a single subject at one time? Of does this experience signal some logical relation between the contents of the emotions, analogous to the relation between contrary propositions which make for inconsistent beliefs? And can the notion of inconsistency apply to aesthetic emotions? After distinguishing some varieties of opposition and expanding on the subtle relation of consistency to compatibility as these might apply to emotions, I explore ways (drawing inspiration from work by Karen Jones and by Carol Magai and Jeannette Haviland-Jones), in which a framework for thinking of emotional consistency might be grounded in the physiology, phenomenology, and action-tendencies involved in emotions, particularly as these play out over long periods of a life. This affords a plausible notion of emotional coherence, and supports an individualistic vision of wisdom, as the effective elaboration of emotional dynamics over a lifetime. It fails, however, to ground a viable notion of consistency for aesthetic emotions.

EMOTIONAL CONSISTENCY

What's the Problem?

Most of our lives are riddled with incoherence. It is as central to the springs of fiction as to the anguish of ordinary life that we all too commonly fear what we desire, resent whom we love, feel surprised by what we thought we expected, pursue goals we profess to despise, and in countless other ways seem to be divided within ourselves. What do such conflicts actually amount to? Do they show, as Plato and others have thought, that individual humans are but miniature societies, among whose members conflict marks divergent interests? Should we espouse ideals that counsel hierarchic order and inner harmony? or do such counsels amount to artificial constraints based on the denial of ineluctable facts about human nature?

I do not hope to answer these large questions. At best I aim to clarify the relations between the notions of compatibility and of consistency of emotions, to offer a few suggestions about the origins of such conflicts, their range of application, and the place of awareness in their discovery and resolution. I also hope to plead for an individualistic answer to the normative question of how, and of how much, emotional coherence is worthy of being pursued.

My topic affords two points of entry.

The first rests on the consideration that emotions seem to impart information about the world. They tell us about what's dangerous, incongruous, reprehensible, unfair, complicated, novel, or poisonous; or about who is beautiful, generous, successful, unfortunate, hostile or friendly. That information might be biased or mistaken—and the deliverance of one emotion might therefore be contradicted by that of another.

Some of the items on this list, you may say, are not really about the world, but about myself and how the world might affect me. Why not? The world includes me. Emotions are

Janus-faced: they face inward, to the mind and body of the subject, and outward, to what might be affecting mind and body. So to say that emotions tell me something about the world means they tell me about myself, about the world outside me, and about how the two relate.

Furthermore, it has long been a familiar idea that emotions tell us about the world beyond me *by* telling me about my own body (James 1884). In the version rehearsed more recently by (Damasio 1994), emotions involve proprioception of somatic markers, without which we lose our capacity to plan in our long-term interests. (But it will become important that we are not necessarily aware of somatic markers *as such.*) A similar thought is implicit in the notion of psychoanalytic *transference* which plays a key role in therapy. The trained analyst learns to interpret her own emotional reactions to the patient as indicating something about the patient.

All this suggests that it might be worth while trying to make sense of the notion of *emotional truth* (de Sousa 2002). Where there is truth, there must be the possibility of falsehoods inconsistent with that truth. What then would be the domain of such truths, and the nature of the inconsistencies involved?

Since emotions are Janus-faced, the notion of emotional truth, and hence of emotional consistency, must span two different domains: my own responses, and the world to which I respond. The first domain is perhaps relevant to what is meant by *authenticity*: one who is authentic is one who is *true to herself*. There is much need to clarify just what that might mean: I hope to contribute a little to this task at the end of this essay. But first I turn to some sceptical doubts likely to be aroused by the putative relevance of emotions to the world outside me.

Deflationary Doubts.

One might object that the thought that emotions represent the world through the mediation of my body amounts to nothing here more than the trivial fact that I can infer something about what affects me from the nature of its effects on me. In any direct sense, the

objection might go, emotions are no more representational than is a bruise, from which we can make the inference that the world affords a blunt object in the vicinity. If that is the sense in which emotions bring knowledge of the world, it is not interesting enough to be worth noting.

A variant of this move consists in noting that the entities involved in inferences are always *propositions.* Insofar as emotions cause us to hold propositions, which in turn generate inferences, emotions indeed afford information about the world. But their role is purely causal, and so again they provide information only in the sense that a bruise provides information.

Both versions of this moves ignore a crucial difference between a bruise and an emotion. It is reasonable to suppose that the indicative functions of bodily states in emotion have been *selected* so as to provide information. A bruise is just an effect: it has no evolved signalling function. The bodily manifestations of emotion, by contrast, are *supposed* to tell us something.

So the deflationary move is misguided. In any case, we could avoid deflationary considerations altogether if we agreed to regard emotions themselves as judgments, albeit essentially evaluative judgments. (Solomon 1984, Nussbaum 2001). Such views advert to the outward Janus face of emotions: they regard the judgments in question not as being induced by emotions through the medium of information about myself, but as judgments in their own right. Their felt quality includes a valence attributed to the *experience* of the emotion as such, and is dependent on the response the values provoke in me. At the same time they carry information about the value of the states of affairs in the world outside referred to in their *content*. Hence they generate other judgments by inference, not mere causation.

Let me go along with this for a moment. What then, we may ask, of the objective validity of those judgments? For something to be about the world, it isn't enough for it to take propositional form. The propositions must really refer to the world, not just depend on my response. If something like Mackie's (1977) "error theory" applies to the values to which

emotions constitute responses, then those emotions will be in the odd position of never being true, although they will sometimes be false.

Perhaps. But maybe we are mistaken in demanding more. For consider this: if I respond in certain ways, it may not be up to me to determine whether these reactions truly reflect the world outside me, but it *is* up to me to decide whether I mean them to do so: for that I need only acknowledge the possibility of contradiction. Consider theologians trying to determine whether a candidate for sainthood has really performed a miracle. They may be impervious to the fact that their inability to discover a satisfactory scientific explanation is hardly proof that none exists. But they accept that the particulars of the case can be discussed, and that relevant arguments and evidence can be offered for and against the conclusion that a miracle occurred. That does not validate their claims, but it suffices for the concept of consistency to get a grip. We might call it "self-made inconsistency".

Now see how this applies to emotions. To claim that an emotion tells me something about the world amounts to an acknowledgement that it might be mistaken. This is compatible with the truth of even a fairly extreme form of error theory of the justification of emotion. From this point of view, I can still ask what *counts* as being contradicted, or what it is for the deliverances of two different emotions to be inconsistent.

If this were the only sense in which emotions admitted of contraries, it would already provide some minimal sense for the notion, since it would account for the phenomenological fact that I am sometimes disposed to *think* that one emotion contradicts another. But it would still raise the following questions: when I think that, what is it really that I'm thinking? What in fact is it for two emotions to contradict one another? In particular, does it mean that the emotions cannot in fact occur together, or that there is something irrational about their occurring together? And if it depends on my *thinking* that I am experiencing a conflict, can it ever happen when I am not even aware of my emotions?

Before addressing these questions, I want to trace a second route into my topic. Some months ago I heard a talk by the philosopher Alexander Nehamas[1] in which he remarked that we don't mind if our friends have terrible taste, so long as we are satisfied that their taste is *consistent*. This was intriguing and appeared to make sense, but the appearance faded under scrutiny. What would be a combination of aesthetic choices that would *fail* of consistency? It seemed to me that any pair of choices could be made to seem coherent, providing we had the ingenuity to invent a story into which both would fit.

And so perhaps we should transfer the burden of explicating emotional consistency on to the notion of a consistent *story*. (I've long held that most of our emotions, in any case, unfold like stories.) Here again there was an idea as tantalizing as it was slippery. For it certainly seems to be true that some stories are more coherent than others. But the more obvious ways in which that is true don't help. Here are some things that would make for an incoherent story: I tell you that it happened on a dark night in the dead of a cold winter, and that the protagonist was suffering from the scorching tropical sun. Or I tell you that the heroine has long jet black hair, and that her hair is blonde and short. Assuming that the references in both sentences are to the same protagonist at the same place and time, this is inconsistent. But the example doesn't help, because what needs to be explained is how some special way in which emotions can be inconsistent might be illuminated by a notion of coherence in stories, and the simple notion of logical inconsistency is just what we don't know how to customize to fit emotions. On the contrary: to make sense of the notion of coherent stories, we exercise our intuitive sense of what emotions are appropriately conjoined with provoking events and with one another.

So it seems one make the case for consistently liking the most *incongruous* things. (But what, for that matter, is incongruity?) Say you liked Palestrina and acid rock—well, that's easy:

1. Now published as Nehamas (2002).

they're both meant to induce altered states of consciousness and sound especially good on dope. Or Palestrina and rap? Harder, perhaps, but doesn't each express with passionate single-mindedness the spirit of a certain circumscribed but intelligible world view? And so forth. If this were a game, where a challenger throws out putatively inconsistent tastes to be fitted into coherent stories, the challenger would always lose against an imaginative opponent. So what could this notion amount to? In the attempt to find examples, one is immediately drawn to cases that appear to present what are intuitively *aesthetic* oppositions. This indicates that we intuitively think there *are* such things. But it brings us no closer to figuring out what they might be, since this was precisely one of the triggers of my original puzzlement.

Varieties of Opposition.

Plato argued in a notorious passage of the *Republic* (IV:435 ff) that the soul must consist of three separate agencies. The crucial premise of the argument was that a single agency can't effect contraries at one time in the same thing in the same respect. What plausibility this has comes from the fact that one can't move in two directions at once. But the argument is fallacious in two interesting ways. First, the states that are supposedly incompatible in this way are intentional states, and it is their intentional objects that are contraries. It is not necessarily true that intentional states having contrary contents can't both exist in the same subject at the same time. The sort of situation Plato has in mind might be analogous to *believing p* and *believing not-p*, or it might be analogous to *believing-possible p* and *believing-possible not-p*. The first pair may be inconsistent, the second plainly is not. Indeed, one can invert Plato's argument and regard it as a simple reductio of the very position he is trying to establish. Since I am a single agent, and do experience contrary impulses, the case is manifestly not impossible. On the other hand, it doesn't mean I'm *rational*. The rationality of holding two propositional attitudes with

incompatible contents remains to be addressed. So far I've assumed that some normative standards of consistency apply to emotions, but that remains to be argued.

A second objection stems from regarding the states in question as *dispositional.* A disposition such as *fragility* is specified by a conditional in which *breaking* figures as a consequent: *if subjected to force or shock, it will break.* So a disposition to do *A* and a disposition to refrain from doing *A* are not incompatible, providing the antecedents of the two conditionals spelling out the disposition are different. I might be pacific and bellicose at the same time, providing the conditions that will trigger the bellicose disposition are not identical with those under which I will behave peacefully. This is a weaker objection, because Plato could claim it was covered by his provisos: "same ways, same respect," etc.. But the objection still has force, because one could retort that the phenomenology of such conflicted states doesn't rule out rapid alternations of opposites: a single agent can hesitate between turning left and turning right, making alternating nascent movements in one direction and the other in rapid succession.

Still, it can't be denied that some emotional states are experienced as conflicted. If the conflict doesn't arise from the opposition of separate agencies in the grip of incompatible states, what does account for it? What would it mean to construe it as inconsistency?

Compatibility and Consistency.

Compatibility and consistency are not the same, but the relation between them is subtle. Consider loathing and love: are they not inconsistent emotions? (Neu 2000) It seems so for two distinct but easily confounded reasons, related to each of emotions' Janus-faces. One is that it's hard to see how what both emotions tell me about their target could both be true—that she is lovable, that she is loathsome (unless one is allowed to specify *respects*.) That is a question of consistency. The other is that it's hard to see how one could *feel* both emotions simultaneously. This relates to the emotions as feelings, considered in abstraction from their intentionality.

Feelings have *compatibility* conditions: one might feel both hungry and cold, or hungry and warm. But one can't feel both hot and cold in the same respect at the same time.

If two states are *compatible*, it must be possible for both to exist together. If they are *consistent*, it means that each refers to something else, a "content", and it is the *contents* of the respective states that must able to coexist. In other words, the difference between the two—with their uneasy relations—only shows up in intentional states.

This is easily illustrated in terms of belief: to attribute contrary beliefs to an agent is to ascribe inconsistency. Thus if *p* and *q* are inconsistent (or incompatible) this will be because they can't be both true together. To ascribe to Arthur belief in both *p* and *q* is to tax him with inconsistency, and hence irrationality. Providing irrationality of this sort is possible, the two *states of belief* are compatible. But if *p* and *q* are explicit contradictories—of the form *p and not-p*—the case is not so clear. It may be psychologically impossible, or perhaps even logically incoherent, for someone to be inconsistent because s/he actually assents to an explicit contradiction. Hence the ascription of such a deplorable state boomerangs to convict the ascriber (de Sousa 1971). The refusal to ascribe belief in an outright contradiction is sometimes referred to as a "principle of charity". But there isn't really anything particularly charitable about it, unless it's charity to give up what you can't hold onto. No conceivable evidence could establish that someone actually believes an explicit contradiction. So the ascription of such a belief, rather like the alleged finding that something is a miracle, is doomed always to be less credible than the alternative hypothesis—which here, as in the case of miracles, is that there is something we haven't been smart enough to figure out.

The case of mere inconsistency and the case of outright contradiction are relatively clear. But somewhere in between there must be hard cases. The case of *believing p and believing not-p*, simultaneously but not in a single act of assent, is a case in point. One temptation is to assimilate

it to the ascription of an inconsistency; but another is to view it as amounting to the impossible ascription of a belief in an outright contradiction. Like the former, *believing p and believing not-p* appears to presume nothing more unimaginable than a failure to confront one's own thoughts with one another. As in the latter, however, it seems impossible to imagine how it could be established that this is truly the best description of the agent's predicament.

The problem is magnified when we try to apply this schema to emotions, since we can't rely here on any preconception of what counts as the difference between an inconsistency that is reasonably ascribed, and one that boomerangs to indict the ascriber. But we can still take away the following lesson from the case of belief. If we are to have any hope of making sense of inconsistent emotions, we must distinguish *incompatible* states, which cannot consistently be ascribed together, from *inconsistent* states, which, if truly so ascribed, convict the agent of violating norms of rationality. At the same time, we must be prepared to find borderline cases.

Consistency of Contents.

What might constitute inconsistency of contents for intentional states other than beliefs? If emotions were typically some sort of judgments, we could rest with this:

> *Two emotions are inconsistent iff the content of the judgments they embody are contraries or contradictories.*

Suppose that *admiration* embodies the judgment that its target is of great worth, while *contempt* embodies the judgment that its target is worthless. Assuming the provisos of "same target, same respect," etc., and setting aside concerns about the univocity of *worth*—i.e. ignoring the fact that something might be worthy in one sense but not in another—'*X is of great worth'* and *'X is worthless*' are logical contraries. So admiration and contempt are inconsistent emotions.

This line of thought faces three immediate problems. First, the number of emotions for which a judgment-based analysis of this sort is plausible is very small. It might work for

contempt and admiration, for certain forms of fear and attraction, perhaps for secure contentment and jealousy. But it seems highly doubtful that love and hate can be dealt with in this way, or joy, sorrow, depression, elation, sexual desire or disgust. Secondly, the cases that *can* yield to this treatment are anyway beside the point. For if the question of emotional consistency is to be of any interest, it must be because it is not reducible to logical relations between judgments. Thirdly, while there is a clear rationale avoiding inconsistent beliefs, there is so far no equally clear rationale for insisting that we *ought* to avoid feeling inconsistent emotions.

All three problems spring, I surmise, from the grain of truth in the traditional view that what emotions conflict with are not primarily other emotions, but *reason*. If emotions can be inconsistent, on that view, it is because they are intrinsically *irrational*: it is therefore idle to demand that they be anything else. The view draws comfort from some familiar facts of phenomenology. First, all proposed judgment-equivalents for joy, sorrow, depression, elation, sexual desire or disgust sound highly strained. Second, in so far as emotions do embody judgments, they may, like perceptual illusions, persist despite clear knowledge of their falsehood. Thus if fear embodies the judgment that something is dangerous, it can be notoriously impervious to the knowledge that one is not in fact in the presence of danger. The converse is also true: in the light of what we know about the relative risks, we should not only give up fear of flying but take up fear of riding in cars. Yet we often don't. All this is unsurprising in the face of a good deal of neurophysiological evidence now available that Plato might after all have been right: that the "faculty" that leads us to experience visceral fear and the faculty of judgment that tells us what is dangerous are indeed separate faculties (Ledoux 2000; Panksepp 2001).

Here is how these facts bear on the problems raised a moment ago. Suppose that at least some emotions are in part attributable to brain and somatic processes that elude control by the rational processes of judgment associated with the cortex. Then—if we are independently convinced that there are normative standards of consistency applicable to emotions—we should

look for *sui generis* notions of emotional consistency rather than hoping to derive them from logical relations between judgments. For those relations are embodied in brain structures that parallel but do not directly compete with those that implement the logical space of emotions.

Compatibility of Success vs. Compatibility of Satisfaction.

Here is a further reason for deviating from the model of consistency of judgments. Any intentional state that takes propositional objects may be assessed in terms of two distinct properties. The first I call *success*. In the case of belief, the appropriate measure of success relates to its aim of *truth*. The second is *semantic satisfaction,* which in the case of beliefs, as it confusingly happens, is also truth. In the case of other propositional attitudes, however, success and satisfaction are distinct. Desire, for example, is trivially *for* satisfaction, but its rightness does not depend on truth (if it did, there would be no logical difference between belief and desire). A desire that is not satisfied is not thereby proved wrong, in the sense that a false belief is wrong. Desire aims at the good: it fails only if its object is not good or desirable.[2]

This logical point lies behind the familiar moral thesis that not all values are compatible (Berlin 1981; Williams 1986). Obviously to say that not all values are compatible is not to say that they are not, compatibly, simultaneously *values:* such a view would refute itself. Rather it is to say that they cannot all simultaneously be *realized.* Their incompatibility in this sense does not preclude their all being true *values*.

It follows that if emotions are either propositional attitudes having values as their objects or—as I believe but won't attempt to argue here—*perceptions* of value, then the fact that not all values are compatible will frustrate their simultaneous pursuit, but won't stop emotional responses from reflecting genuine values. Emotional responses to such values will be compatible insofar as they are mere apprehensions, just as the desire for two incompatible goods are, as

2. I've elaborated on this in (de Sousa 1974), and again in (de Sousa 2002).

desires, compatible. These won't count as inconsistent, any more than desires for incompatible goals should count as inconsistent. But like any such pair of desires, they will embody a potential conflict. The conflict will surface as soon as any *action-tendencies* associated with the emotions are set in motion. This may provide, as I'll suggest in a moment, a reason for regarding the attitudes as irrational, and therefore inconsistent in a subsidiary sense.

Can there be emotions that avoid triggering any action-tendencies altogether? The most likely candidates are aesthetic emotions. For the aesthetic might be characterized precisely as *that type of emotional response in which any action-tendency has been suppressed*. In that sense, the existence of a pair of incompatible desires entails conflict, but the existence of a pair of conflicting aesthetic apprehensions need not do so, even if the action-tendencies they would give rise to *would* conflict, were their triggering conditions to be satisfied. They don't in fact clash, because the aesthetic attitude stops them from arising.

This conception of the aesthetic poses something of a threat to Nehamas's idea: for it seems to imply that in matters of aesthetics, it is meaningless to speak of inconsistency.[3] I will ask later whether we might mitigate this threat. But for now I turn the other way, to explore the easier question of what might account for emotional incompatibility.

Compatibility of Resource Use.

In some lovely experiments, Marcel Kinsbourne showed some years ago that if you balance a pole on your right index finger you can't talk at the same time. If you balance the pole on your left index finger you can talk but not sing. On then-prevalent assumptions about

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3. This consequence won't hold, if we reject the differentia for aesthetic emotions that I've offered in the text. Thus Nico Frijda writes (personal communication; cf. also (Frijda 1986)): "In front of art, there are the action tendencies of becoming big and proud (which may make me sing), and becoming small or humble (which may make me weep); of wanting to be the object, or be like it, or fuse with it, or to possess it, or to annihilate its seductive force; of being challenged to explore, or of being satisfied with "being there" and contented." This is ingenious, but quite compatible with the radical inhibition of all these action-tendencies. For the fact remains that the only action we actually do take in the presence of art is to *contemplate* it.

hemispheric asymmetry,[4] this is evidence that pre-emption of brain resources in one hemisphere interferes with a task requiring resources in the same hemisphere, but not with one that mobilizes the other hemisphere (Kinsbourne and Hicks 1978). Could something like this be true of some pairs of emotions?

Insofar as emotions involve action-tendencies or physiological processes, they might compete for brain resources. We can get a glimpse of how it might work by thinking of the basically antagonistic organization of the autonomous nervous system into sympathetic and parasympathetic subsystems. Here it isn't action-tendencies as such which are involved, (though the action of the sympathetic system has the function of preparing the body to react to pressing need or danger), but related physiological phenomena, so that the problem about the dispositional and intentional character of action-tendencies will not arise. The sympathetic system stimulates heartbeat, raises blood pressure, dilates the pupils, dilates the trachea and bronchi, stimulates the conversion of liver glycogen into glucose, shunts blood away from the skin and viscera to the skeletal muscles, brain, and heart, inhibits peristalsis in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The parasympathetic reverses these effects (Kimball 2003). These antagonistic effects obviously have consequences for the compatibility of basic emotions, insofar as some emotions tend to activate sympathetic effects, and others parasympathetic effects. (If I'm feeling *tight-assed* I won't *shit in my pants*.) But the brain processes underlying basic emotions are rather more specialized. According to Jaak Panksepp (2001),

> the brain contains a variety of genetically ingrained emotional systems for generating specific classes of emotional behaviors.... To all appearances, affective experience is a rather direct manifestation of the arousal of these systems. When these systems are electrically stimulated, humans report urges to act and describe emotional experiences that have a feeling of belongingness, as opposed to being alien to the self. (p. 147)

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4. These are: that motor functions of the left hand are controlled by the motor cortex in the right hemisphere, and those of the right hand by the left; that the right hemisphere also controls music (at least in non-musicians), and that the seat of language is generally in the left hemisphere.

The following table illustrates the neural regions and main neurotransmitters involved in the processes implicated in Panksepp's seven "basic emotional systems."

= Panksepp Table 1 (from p. 147) about here.

The table shows that some of the same neurotransmitters are implicated in different emotions, as are some of the same brain regions. But it affords no easy inference as to the compatibility of the emotions in question. Panksepp does, however, hold out hope that "a new discipline of experimental philosophy" might look into the "laws of sentiment", citing a number of such "laws" proposed by (Shand 1920). Several of these refer to compatibilities and incompatibilities. Here is a sampling:

> ^ 17) "The joyful temper lowers the threshold of sensibility for joy, hope, and confidence, but raises it for sorrow, despondency, and despair." (p. 154).
>
> ^ 38) "Fear and anger tend always to exclude one another, where both are referred to the same objects." (p. 254).
>
> ^ 70) "Sorrow tends to be increased by the knowledge that another rejoices at our suffering." (p. 341). (quoted by Panksepp 2001, 151).

Instancing such "laws", Panksepp suggests that "the arousal of the various emotional command systems could be distinguished subjectively from each other by humans as being fundamentally distinct feelings...." (Panksepp 2001, 147) This encourages the thought that the most direct route to the question of the logical relations among those basic emotions that are least susceptible to cortical control might actually be through their phenomenology. It assumes that emotions necessarily have a phenomenology. This will confront us with the question of the role of

awareness alluded to above (p.4) if it turns out that large parts of the emotional dynamics which rule our lives are not accessible to awareness. But for now we can evade that problem by focusing on the behavioral concomitants of emotion, as do these Shandian "laws":

> ^ 33) "The universal end of Fear is merely to prevent the occurrence of some threatening event whether the danger be 'real' or 'imaginary.' " (p. 215)
>
> ^ 37) "All varieties of anger tend to accomplish their ends by some kind of aggressive behavior." (p. 250). (quoted by Panksepp 2001 p.151)

These emotions involve dispositions to flight and attack. If both are activated, they can't both attain their respective behavioral aims. We are close to Plato once more.

Compatibility and Consistency of Action-Tendencies.

Actually all of Shand's laws, were they not mitigated by the qualifier "tends to", would probably be false. But they are suggestive in alluding to emotional states likely to be thought to be conflicted because of their associated behavioral dispositions. This returns us to the role of action-tendencies. In addition to their bearing on compatibility, these may provide a way to approach the question of emotional consistency. Shand's laws 33 and 37, for example, imply that if I feel anger and fear at the same time, I will be disposed both to approach aggressively and to withdraw from potential harm. And since I can't do both, we might infer that from a practical point of view it would be irrational simultaneously to hold that particular pair of emotions, in some indirect sense that is grounded in emotions's characteristic motivational force. This might yield a weaker but viable sense in which two emotions might be held to be normatively inconsistent—though Shand seems himself inconsistent in also maintaining, in the particularly dubious "law" 38, that such cases of unreasonableness can't occur at all.

Here's how this might work. Insofar as action-tendencies are dispositional, the considerations adduced against Plato (p. 6) apply. On the other hand, practical incompatibilities

might suffice to ground a normative standard of emotional rationality if they are *felt* as such. It might seem *irrational* to remain simultaneously committed, even conditionally, to incompatible courses of action. For even if the experience of an emotion is, at least in part, about the world outside me, it is also typically experienced as having a certain felt quality in itself. Emotions that are *incompatible*, therefore, are likely to be *felt* as normatively *inconsistent*, felt, that is, as a problem requiring some sort of resolution. In this sense, just as too much inconsistency shades between beliefs into incompatibility, so conversely certain kinds of incompatibility may turn into inconsistency, by the "self-made" criterion I offered on p. 4 above: if I *acknowledge* an attitude as inconsistent with one I hold, that suffices to validate the ascription.

The Temporal Dimension

An accusation of inconsistency is commonly intended as imputing *inconstancy*: an irrational tendency to change one's emotional attitudes from one moment to the next. If a life as a whole can be more or less wise, then presumably there must be some principles on which some mixes of constancy and flexibility in our attitudes through time are preferable to others.

But how to find such principles? Grounding appraisals of emotional attitude through time on logical principles alone seems hopeless. Here are two illustrations, pertaining respectively to assessments of the future and the past, of how what turns out to be factually normal is often judged, in the abstract, to be irrational or even illogical despite the absence of clear standards.

George Ainslie (1992; 2001) has explored the many consequences of the fact that we tend to discount the future at a hyperbolic rate. Prominent among these consequences is that as we approach a pair of unequally distant targets, of which the more distant is rated as of greater value, their order of preference will get reversed as one gets closer to the lesser. (The effect resembles the perspectival effect that allows a smaller building to occlude the taller when one

gets closer to the former.) We commonly regard this as irrational: if the more distant prospect is indeed more valuable absolutely, how could its value change merely by virtue of proximity? The problem is that it is hard to say why this is not a good idea without begging the question against the alternative view that value reversal is just a reasonable response to a change in perspective brought by the passage of time (Bovens 1999; de Sousa forthcoming 2003).

Assessments of value can also illustrate the impossibility of making good on imputations of inconsistency about the past in a rationally satisfying way. Daniel Kahneman (2000) has found that when we look back on global past episodes that consist of several stages, our evaluation of the whole is not additively related to the evaluation of the parts. Instead we seem to use a "peak-end rule", which takes into account only the "peak" segment (registering the most extreme valence), and the last segment whatever its valence (the "end"). As a result, people rated a longer period of discomfort as the less unpleasant, providing the added period of discomfort was less painful than the last phase of the shorter. (Kahneman 2000, 696-7) In this case, then, people rated *more pain* as significantly *less unpleasant*. This contradicts what seems an obvious truth, that if you take a string of unpleasant moments the addition of extra minutes of pain can only *increase* total discomfort. Kahneman regards this as involving "violations of logic, because the temporal dimension of experience is not directly included in the representations that are evaluated." (p. 707). He takes it to be inconsistent to respond to each component moment as indicated by the ratings assigned to those moments, but then fail to add them up when assessing the whole. But actually there is no violation of *logic* here at all. The inconsistency, if there is one, is of an altogether different sort, calling for some sort of *sui generis* emotional criterion of consistency over time, not reducible to any standard test of consistency.

Compatibility of Perceptual Framings. .

Karen Jones has advocated a "practical" notion of emotional rationality which suggests one way of addressing the temporal dimension. (Jones forthcoming 2003). On her view, to say

that emotions are perceptions of value amounts to the claim that the objects emotion brings into salience are of practical importance to the agent's projects. They are those to which the agent *ought* to be attending and responding. Jones suggests thinking of the rationality of emotions as rational perceptual "framing", where the framing of a situation is what enables us to view relevant factors as suitably reason-giving. An agent

> "wants all and only such considerations to be salient to her — 'all' so as to be sure that she will not have occasion to regret her choice as having been made in ignorance of some important consideration, and 'only' so as to be sure that her deliberation will not be derailed by considerations that she does not think matter." (Jones p. 18)

The normative force of this suggestion is clear: rational emotions facilitate the process of "latching on" to the considerations that *should* form the basis of a practical decision. This is not equivalent, Jones contends, to the suggestion canvassed above that emotions dispose us to form judgments, for the considerations to which emotions may sensitize us may be appropriate to our individual situation even though the objective beliefs they facilitate are less than probable. The emotion, we might say, comes ready-weighted according to the degree of relevance it may have for an individual, rather than keyed to objective epistemic criteria.

On this interpretation, consistency of two different emotional states would depend on two factors. One is the compatibility of the strategies of action they "frame". This is again subject to the reservation discussed above about dispositional states. The second factor concerns the compatibility of perceptual salience. Attention determines not just what is seen, but *how* it is seen and what it is seen *as*. To illustrate, take an often-cited case raised by (Murdoch 1970): can a mother-in-law change her attitude to her daughter-in-law by construing the latter's *vulgarity* as *vitality*, her *juvenile* manner as *youtfulness*? If so, can she attend to both at once? (one can see

the duck and the rabbit, but not at the same time. The two states are incompatible, and if they weren't they would be inconsistent)

The compatibility of frames in both these senses is obviously much harder to assess than the compatibility of propositions. This leads us to expect three consequences.

First, it confirms our sense that two conflicting emotions can indeed be held to be inconsistent, where the whole orientation either of my attention or behaviour is monopolized by one emotion. In such cases any other emotion that would reconfigure those same elements in the service of a different perspective would be incompatible with the first, and might thereby be rated irrational and so termed in this sense inconsistent. This point in itself gathers together three ideas that have already been broached: (i) inconsistency of emotions is in part a matter of competitive resource use, but can't be reduced entirely to that; (ii) factual compatibility cannot be clearly split off from normative inconsistency of content; and (iii) the normative standards we are seeking must be thought of as applying not just at an instant but across a stretch of time.

Second, Jones's suggestion also squares with the observation that the inconsistency of emotions can be used dynamically in order to move from one state to another: in therapy, one emotion is often pressed into service to dislodge another. More about this in a moment.

The third observation is one that makes our topic seem especially difficult: namely that the consistency of any two emotions cannot be assessed in the abstract, on general principles independent of the individual concerned. But how are we to relativize this assessment to a specific individual? And how, if the notion must be relativized to a particular, can one make use of the normative or critical notion of emotional consistency?

Normative standards in general are generally assumed to be universal in their applicability. There is just one exception: the *aesthetic*. In matters of aesthetics, there are no formulable

principles of coherent taste that apply across wide ranges of properties.[5] Yet we stubbornly share a strong intuition that there is something to the idea of aesthetic coherence. But if, as I suggested above, we can make a coherent story out of just about any incongruous collection of fragmental anecdotes, then we still lack an account of what it means to ascribe aesthetic coherence or inconsistency to a set of emotions.[6] So aesthetic emotions appear to constitute a counter-example to Jones's thesis that emotional rationality is practical. On the other hand, they fit in well with her claim that such rationality must be relativized to the specific characteristics of an individual agent. Of course, aesthetic emotions may evade standards of rationality altogether. But in that case Nehamas's intuition about aesthetic consistency could not be made out at all.

In the rest of this essay, I will explore a perspective that may help to make progress with the various questions gathered as we went thus far.

Fractal Patterns of Emotion

In their study of the three therapists Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis and Fritz Perls (Magai and Haviland-Jones 2002, henceforth 'M&H') offer a major extension of Jones's perspective on long-term practicality. They propose that each one of their subjects—and by induction the rest of us too—is driven in both life and work by a dominant pattern of emotion.[7] While all three of their

5. Arnold Isenberg (1949) has shown how to reconcile this fact with the intuition that criticism is nevertheless rational. His solution derives precisely from the contrast between the perceptual as opposed to propositional knowledge involved in critical appreciation.

6. We can't, in particular, understand the sort of case Nehamas had in mind in terms of a requirement that the story into which the various apparently incongruous parts can be made to fit must be a *common* or familiar one. For that would disqualify all cases of originality and creativity, which in itself seems incompatible with our best understanding of the standards that govern the aesthetic.

7. For a similar thesis, in a darker vein, see also (Moldoveanu and Nohria 2002).

therapist-subjects repudiate the traditional psychoanalyst's interest in patients' past and particularly their childhood, M&H argue convincingly that in life, theory and practice, each exemplifies a unique pattern, largely set up in childhood, characterized by the dominant role of certain emotions as well as the inhibition or rejection of others. Ellis, for example, had devised in early childhood a number of stoic maxims by which he was able to keep anxiety and suffering at bay. His therapeutic practice consisted in large part in exploiting his dominant emotions of anger and contempt to browbeat his patients into using those same emotions to ward off their own negative emotions. Each of the three therapists displays a characteristic "emotional signature", a dynamic pattern in which, in terms borrowed from Dynamic Systems Theory, some emotions function as "attractors" and some as "repellors". This presupposes that there are indeed dynamic relations between emotions, enabling both subject and therapist to use one emotion in controlling or modifying another. Some seem to be based on incompatibilities akin to those in Shand's "laws": in a simple "oppositional" relation, for example, Ellis is seen as controlling fear both in himself and in his patients by mocking it (p. 328). For Fritz Perls "[S]hyness is a form of shame... an interrupter for intense excitement", and in turn "excitement, when interrupted becomes anxiety." Some dynamics are more elaborate: "contempt can serve as an anti-shame strategy.... However, once the contempt defense is rendered impotent through the contagion of shame, renewed opportunities for self-awareness and self-evaluation are opened up. " (M&H 95). See-sawing dominance of shame and contempt made Perls "the master craftsman of humiliation":

> By subjecting patients to his contempt for their manipulations and weaknesses, and by hounding them with his relentless scorn and derision, he was able to provoke the shame /rage spiral and the attendant release of tremendous emotional energy. In fostering the conversion of shame into anger and by supporting patients' tentative movements towards self-assertion, he taught a liberation politics of emotion for underdogs. (M&H 185).

M&H's most original contention is that these emotional signatures have a fractal structure. They can be detected in the patterns of the three therapists' life decisions; they find themselves erected into principles in the main tenets of the therapists' theoretical work, and they show up in the specific gestures, attitudes, physical postures and facial expressions revealed in the frame-by-frame analysis of therapeutic sessions recorded on film.

The attractors and repellors that emerge in these fractal structures are distinguished by various degree of fixity. Rogers, for example is found to be a life-long avoider of anger, whose main attractors are joy and shame. For Perls and Ellis, anger and contempt are the major attractors. Perls's dynamic is based on oscillation between contempt and shame. Ellis's pattern is much more rigidly fixed on avoidance of strong negative emotions. These differences account for the different potential for long term transformation over the three subjects' lives.

As we increase the time span in terms of which we look at the emotions, the issue of consistency broadens out, from the narrow question of what emotions can counteract or generate other emotions, into a wider question about the leading structural and dynamic patterns in a life. At this level talk of certain clusters of emotions as being consistent or inconsistent takes on a very different resonance. It can no longer rest on any kind of simple compatibility, since in the long term even the most incompatible states may supplant one another. Nor is it a question of whether someone can be assessed in terms of the sort of normative standards that ground ordinary charges of inconsistency. Yet the notion of consistency still seems usable at both the explanatory and the critical level, to aid our understanding of how the dynamics of emotions can shape a coherent and productive life. In that spirit, M&H speak of the dependency in all three of their subjects of their "wisdom" on their "passion". And indeed, what emerges from their examination of these successful yet very different individuals, interestingly comparable since they are all in the same profession, is that all make the best of the widely different individual emotional configurations, around which their personal thriving and professional success is built.

Wisdom and Emotional Coherence.

M&H's book can be viewed as an argument in favour of a certain conception of wisdom. This is not, as in most traditional accounts of wisdom, a matter of fulfilling some universal ideal based on a proper understanding of human nature. Rather it has to do with the achievement of a certain fit between the basic emotional configuration that defines an individual nature and that individual's choices and habits. As I said at the beginning, this suggests a notion closer to authenticity than to truth as commonly understood. Authenticity is truth to myself, and insofar as each of us is different authenticity will differentiate us, not lead us along the same path. M&H 's book helps us to see in some detail how that could make sense. In such a framework, as they point out, uniformity from one person to another is not to be expected. Furthermore, stability is not necessarily an advantage or a virtue. On the contrary, too much fixity, like too little, can impede development and prevent natural chaotic processes from generating a new equilibrium at a different place. Given the informational function of emotion, this is not surprising, since too much fixity is clearly a disadvantage in the search for knowledge as in much of life (Oatley 2000). In illustration, (M&H) show how of their three subjects Rogers was the only one to whom a mid-life "crisis" brought a real sense of change, resulting in more openness in his therapeutic approach and a greater ability to form friendships with men in his personal life. Ellis, in the grip of an emotional pattern erected early in childhood to defend him against all strong negative emotions, changed very little. As for Perls, he constantly hovered between the polar attractors of shame and self-doubt on one side, and contempt and grandiosity on the other, so that the shifts in his mood and behaviour were not matched by long-term changes in that dominant pattern itself.

Despite their reservations about the benefits of stability, M&H do claim that the fractal shape of their subjects' emotions endures throughout their lives, and that their subjects' ways of implementing this pattern constituted their way of grounding their own specific form of wisdom in their own characteristic passion. At this point, we should raise the possibility that they are

being parochial: that valuing consistency over time is a Western bias and not a cultural universal. Eunkook Suh (2002) has pointed out that while many studies confirm the "persistent need for consistency and stability," these studies are exclusively of North American or Western subjects. Suh found that in Korean subjects self-consistency in different contexts was less strong, less prized, and less important to well-being. (Suh 2002 p.1380) Korean subjects are more comfortable than Westerners with the idea that they are many different sorts of persons, depending on situations and contexts. If we follow Gilbert Harman (1999) and John Doris (2002) in believing that most of our faith in the very existence of individual character is actually a mistake resulting from the "fundamental attribution error", Koreans have it right and Westerners have it wrong. Mitigating this result in the context of M&H's leading thesis, however, is the fact that Suh's study did not address consistency of emotions, but of self-characteristics. He encourages the explanatory hypothesis that the Korean subjects' lack of self-consistency, as well as their positive attitude to self-multiplicity, can be attributed entirely to the importance attributed in Asian cultures to rigid standards of appropriate social behaviour, and has no bearing on the emotional springs of the subjects' motivation.

Conclusion: Consciousness, Self-Knowledge, and the Aesthetic

It is a striking feature of the emotional dynamics to which M&H draw attention that they are mostly unavailable to their subjects' consciousness. Although all three are therapists, whom one might expect to have brought their own emotions to a fine point of awareness, it is clear that the influence of the major emotional configuration that dominates their life, their theory and their practice is hidden from their own consciousness. How deep a fact is this? Is it the result of some kind of necessity? How would these men, had they had the benefit of M&H's insights, have used these insights? Could they have incorporated them into their own character in some way? Or

must we suppose that, if they had been shown these truths about themselves, some other crucial fact about the patterns exhibited in their lives would have escaped them, so as to restore to their lives, as it were, a necessarily background of unknowing? Perhaps there exists, at the larger scale of a whole life, something like the impossibility of being fully conscious of one's own processes when executing a skilled task. And yet it's hard to see why, once brought to one's attention, such patterns couldn't be focused on as an object of awareness.

Although M&H make much of this unawareness of their subjects' own emotional patterns, they don't answer or even raise these questions. Let us speculate a little on their behalf. Suppose Ellis were confronted with M&H's account, and came to see the role played in his life and practice by contempt and anger.[8] Might he repudiate it? Might he come to wish he could change? and if so could he change and remain true to himself, *authentic*? My guess is that M&H's prediction would be negative, on the basis of the rigidity of the structures in place throughout Ellis's life. But only a long-term perspective could tell. Suppose Elllis now decries his own behaviour. Either his protestations translate into changed of behaviour, or they don't. If they do, only the long term again can tell. If not, then either the verbal behaviour itself persists or it doesn't. If it doesn't, it was a mere blip. If it does, it becomes itself part of the pattern—that too can be ascertained only over the long term. But by the time it proves to be stable, the new pattern, if any, will doubtless also have passed out of awareness, on the model of the stages of well-rehearsed routines. It follows that the relation of consistency or inconsistency that matters most at this level cannot be exhausted by the phenomenology of emotion, for the most important patterns will not show up as such in conscious experience at all.

Perhaps an individual's thriving does not require her utmost attention or the concentrated use of her intellectual and emotional resources at every juncture. If so, one should be able to take

8. Since Ellis is the only one of their subjects who is still alive, the question might actually find an answer.

at least an aesthetic interest in the patterns formed by one's behaviour. Such an interest, I've argued, would not entail any attendant action-tendency. Taking an aesthetic interest in who one is at any given level of explanation and motivation would not seem to be excluded *a priori* from the life of a wise agent, though it might not change her conduct. But if so, is the agent liable to be judged according to criteria of aesthetic coherence either from herself or from another?

To this question my quest for criteria of emotional consistency can afford no answer. Insofar as emotions involve neural and bodily resources, I have argued, we can make sense of a notion of emotional compatibility. Insofar as emotional rationality is practical, we can also make sense of standards of consistency based on considerations of compatibility but guided in part by the needs of coherent long-term planning. But as regards a criterion of aesthetic consistency, my quest has failed. The only rationales available to understand emotional consistency get no grip on the aesthetic, both because the aesthetic by definition restrains all action-tendencies, and because resource-based physiological criteria of compatibility are not guaranteed to surface into awareness. It is difficult to see how the aesthetic could lack a phenomenology, and hence what sense could be given to an aesthetic inconsistency or conflict that remained unconscious.

Perhaps, however, this failure should be welcomed: the aesthetic is precisely the domain in which we escape the forced choices imposed on us by the need to act. Hence it should also escape the straitjacket of consistency. That doesn't mean that the aesthetic obeys no constraints.

Let me illustrate by returning in conclusion to my earlier comparison with stories. One of the ways any story can be defended is by moving it to a meta-level or level of irony. More generally, we can often get away with a second-order coherence in all aesthetic matters: How do these elements fit together? *Well, I just wanted to show how incongruous these elements are*. The possibility of viewing oneself aesthetically affords a similar strategy, so that authenticity may be bought at the price of recognizing one's own incoherence: *Well, it's incoherent, but it's all me*.

Walt Whitman flaunted his inconsistencies: "*I contradict myself: I am large, I contain multitudes".* On a purely aesthetic level, I have been forced to conclude, Whitman won't be able to make good on his boast. We can now see a third reason for this: namely that on the aesthetic level apparent inconsistency can always take refuge in irony. But that leaves plenty of ways an art work can be criticized, and the incoherence of the notion of aesthetic inconsistency doesn't mean there are no aesthetic critical standards. Nor does it mean such standards can't be applied to our lives, and to the larger configuration of our dominant emotional stance, where this transcends the practical. What those standards are, however, is not something about which I have anything to say. Enough that I have tried to say why consistency is not among them.[9]

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9. My thanks to Wyndham Thiessen, Nico Frijda, and Batja Mesquita for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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