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0521816521 - Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium

Edited by Antony S. R. Manstead, Nico Frijda and Agneta Fischer

Excerpt

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## 1

**Introduction**

Antony S. R. Manstead, Nico H. Frijda,  
and Agneta H. Fischer

**THE AMSTERDAM SYMPOSIUM**

This book arose from the twenty-four keynote papers presented at a meeting that had the same title as this volume: "Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium." It was held in June 2001, in Amsterdam, and was hosted by the Department of Psychology at the University of Amsterdam.

Our purpose in organizing this symposium was to review the current state of the art of research on emotions from a multidisciplinary perspective. Stock-taking of this kind has been undertaken before. In 1927 a meeting was held under the title *Feelings and Emotions: The Wittenberg Symposium* (Reymert, 1928). In 1948 *Feelings and Emotions: The Mooseheart Symposium* was held in Chicago (Reymert, 1950); and in 1969 *Feelings and Emotions: The Loyola Symposium* took place at Loyola University, again in Chicago (Arnold, 1970). Those interested in knowing more about these earlier *Feelings and Emotions* symposia can find the title pages of all three of these books reproduced in the present volume, following p. 4.

The Amsterdam Symposium was inspired by these previous efforts and borrowed its title from them. The turn of the century seemed to be an appropriate moment to take stock of current scientific reflection on emotions. Emotions are central to human behavior and experience. This central role notwithstanding, theory and research had largely ignored emotions during most of the twentieth century. This situation changed rather dramatically during the last thirty years of that century, however. An upsurge of interest was apparent in a number of disciplines, including psychology, biology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, neuroscience, economics, psychiatry, and cognitive science. Important research was performed in all of these fields, and major new insights were obtained. It seemed worthwhile to us, the organizers of the symposium, to reflect on where we now stand.

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FIGURE 1.1. Pictured above are eighteen of the twenty-four speakers at the Amsterdam Symposium. From left to right: Batja Mesquita, Nancy Sherman, Candace Clark, Frans de Waal, Robert Frank (in rear), Bob Solomon (in front), Keith Oatley, John Cacioppo, Arne Ohman, Rick Shweder, Klaus Scherer, Jaak Panksepp, Bob Zajonc, Peter Salovey, Kent Berridge, Peggy Thoits, Jon Elster, and Nico Frijda.

With the assistance of an advisory board of eminent figures in the field of emotion, twenty-four keynote speakers were invited to summarize their views of the domain. They represented most of the disciplines mentioned above. Each speaker made a forty-five-minute presentation; and following each half-day group of three lectures there was a forty-five-minute general discussion. The number of keynote speakers was limited by our expectation that four days would be the maximum that most participants (speakers and audience alike) could devote to the symposium, and by our determination to avoid parallel sessions. The speakers invited therefore emerged from a severe selection process. We began with a much longer list of speakers, each of whom would have merited an invitation. Although we were of course disappointed and frustrated by not being able to include some prominent and productive researchers, we were (and remain) convinced that the final selection of speakers struck a good balance between the importance of the speaker's own theoretical contribution to emotion research and the need to have a range of academic disciplines.

In addition to the keynote presentations and general discussions, two poster sessions were held. About 150 posters were accepted by the program committee. These sessions enabled the presenters (many of whom were Ph.D. students or postdoctoral researchers) to present their own work and interests to others, including, of course, the keynote speakers and other established researchers who attended the meeting.

As well as thanking the keynote speakers, all of whom are represented in this volume, and the audience, who helped to create lively

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and interesting discussions, we would like to acknowledge the financial support that made the symposium (and therefore this book) possible. Generous support was received from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science (KNAW); the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO); the Netherlands Convention Bureau; the European Commission; the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology; the board of the University of Amsterdam; the Department of Psychology at the University of Amsterdam, and the experimental and social psychology programs within that department.

We also thank the members of the advisory committee who helped in suggesting potential keynote speakers from the various disciplines and to evaluate proposals made by the organizers: Roy D'Andrade, Paul Ekman, Jan van Hooff, Richard Lazarus, George Mandler, Martha Nussbaum, Keith Oatley, Jaak Panksepp, W. Gerrod Parrott, Bernard Rimé, Herbert Simon, and Robert Zajonc.

Last but not least, we express heartfelt gratitude to Reyna Veldhuis, who was a superb conference manager, and our sincere thanks to Albina Shayevich, who provided invaluable help with the indexing of this book.

## THE PRESENT VOLUME

The rest of the chapters in this book provide what we believe to be a representative coverage of the major research domains in the study of emotions. These include the nature of basic emotional mechanisms, from a psychological and from a neuroscientific point of view (Berridge, Cacioppo et al., Isen, Öhman & Wiens, Panksepp, Zajonc); the neural correlates of emotional processes (Damasio, Winston & Dolan, Panksepp); the nature of emotional feelings (Cacioppo, Damasio, Winston & Dolan, Frijda, Panksepp); the relationships of emotions to action, rationality, and decisions (Elster, Frijda, Isen, Mellers); the nature of the processes leading to, as well as constituting, emotions (Dunn, Ekman, Scherer); and critical issues surrounding the very concept of emotions, such as those of its presumed passivity, or its distinction from rationality (Elster, Oatley, Shweder, Solomon). In several chapters the authors investigate the fundamental role of emotions in social interaction and in moral issues (Clark, de Waal, Frank, Salovey et al., Sherman), and the complex ways in which emotional experience and behavior relate to the social and cultural context (Clark, Mesquita & Markus, Shweder).

The chapters also clearly reflect the diversity of current methodological approaches to the study of emotions: neuroscientific investigations (Berridge, Damasio, Winston & Dolan, Panksepp); experimental psychological approaches (Cacioppo et al., Isen, Öhman, Mellers, Scherer, Zajonc); questionnaire research in experimental or interview contexts (Mesquita, Salovey); ethologically inspired observations of humans (Dunn) and in-frahumans (de Waal); sociological and/or anthropological analyses (Clark,

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Shweder, Thoits); the analysis of fiction (Oatley); and theoretical reflection (Ekman, Elster, Frank, Frijda, Sherman, Solomon).

We feel that the keynote presentations are representative of current research efforts and orientations with respect to emotions. Together they provide an overview of what is currently being studied and thought about emotions in the variety of disciplines concerned. We could have structured the chapters in a number of ways, each of which would have had a certain logic and coherence. The way they are organized is in terms of five themes: (1) the nature of feelings and emotions; (2) basic psychological processes in feelings and emotions; (3) the impact of affect; (4) feelings and emotions in their sociocultural context; and (5) feelings, emotions, and morality. The papers that formed the basis of these chapters generated a great deal of interest and discussion during the symposium. We believe that readers will also find them informative and provocative.

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# Feelings and Emotions

The Loyola Symposium

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## PART I

# THE NATURE OF FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

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## 2

**On the Passivity of the Passions**

Robert C. Solomon

**ABSTRACT**

How much control do we have over our emotions? Does it make any sense to say that we *choose* our emotions? Psychologists talk about “emotion regulation,” leaving it open to what extent and in what ways the languages of control or of choice might apply. Philosophers have long taken the position, in part because of their celebration of reason, that we can control (but not choose) our emotions only by constraining them, or by controlling their expression. But are questions of regulation, control, and constraint perhaps misleading? In this chapter, I suggest that the *active* and even *willful* dimension of emotion has been too often dismissed, ignored, or what is the same, caricatured so that it makes no sense at all. I defend a model in which such voluntaristic talk captures some important insights about our emotions and consider several objections to this thesis.

The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never regard a grand passion as a destructive torrent upon which a man is swept into uncertain actions as by fate, and which, therefore is an excuse for them.

Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” p. 33

How much control do we have over our emotions? Does it make any sense to say that we *choose* our emotions? Psychologists talk about “emotion regulation,” leaving it open to what extent and in what ways the languages of control or of choice might apply. Philosophers have long taken the position, in part because of their celebration of reason, that we can control (but not choose) our emotions only by constraining them, or by controlling their expression. But is the question of control and constraint perhaps the wrong question? Or a much too limited question? Is controlling an emotion something like controlling a wild animal within? (Horace: “Anger is like riding a wild horse”). Is it like controlling one’s blood pressure, or one’s cholesterol level, something that (certain Yogis excepted) we can do only indirectly? Or is it rather like a boss controlling his or her employees by way

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of various threats and incentives, the “boss” being reason? (Plato’s model in *The Republic*). Or is controlling an emotion like controlling one’s thoughts, one’s speech, one’s arguments, putting them into shape, choosing one’s mode of expression as well as one’s timing? (The difference between spontaneously “blurting” out a comment and giving a considered response may be applicable here.) Or is it like coordinating one’s actions through practice, like riding a bike, which may be “mindless” (that is, wholly unreflective and unselfconscious) but is nevertheless wholly voluntary and both very much within one’s control and a continuous matter of choice?

The question of responsibility (for one’s emotions) has been largely neglected in both philosophy and the social sciences. I have tried to move such matters to center stage. In my first (and I admit very polemical) book on emotions, *The Passions*, I argued outright that emotions should be construed as “actions,” as “doings,” as matters of “choice.” There, and in subsequent books and essays, I have suggested that such emotions as love and anger might sometimes be better understood in terms of the choices we make rather than in terms of visceral reactions, metaphorical or neurological “chemistry,” or passively undergone feelings. Critics and commentators have correctly noted that I was (and still am) influenced by the philosophical psychology of the French “existentialist,” Jean-Paul Sartre. They also noted that Roy Schafer was pursuing much the same line of argument for the disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. My own aim, following Sartre, was to reinforce the role of responsibility with regard to our emotions. As my work developed, this became part of a larger Aristotelian conception of ethics centering on the cultivation of good character, including the “right” emotions.

There are two immediate obstacles to the argument that emotions are akin to actions, and even a matter of choice. The first is the obvious fact that emotions *seem* to happen to us, quite apart from our preferences or intentions. There are occasions in which we are “overwhelmed” by emotion (and the action impulses that immediately follow). And our emotions are often manifested in thoughts that “haunt” us and of which (try as we might) we cannot rid ourselves. The phenomenological point is reinforced by a semantic-syntactic observation, that the language of the passions (starting with the word “passion”) is riddled with passivity, “being struck by” and so on. (This set of observations should be balanced with another, that we sometimes feel guilty or even proud about feeling what we feel and that we often assess our emotions as warranted or not, wise or foolish, appropriate or inappropriate.) The second obstacle is the enormous range of emotions and emotional experiences – from being startled to carefully plotting one’s revenge, from inexplicable panic upon seeing a small spider to a well-warranted fear of being audited by the Internal Revenue Service, from falling “desperately” in love to conscientiously cultivating a life-long loving relationship, from “finding oneself” in a rage to righteous and