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978-0-521-82729-4 - From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category

Thomas Dixon

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From Passions to Emotions

The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category

Today there is a thriving ‘emotions industry’ to which philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists are contributing. Yet until two centuries ago ‘the emotions’ did not exist. In this path-breaking study Thomas Dixon shows how, during the nineteenth century, the emotions came into being as a distinct psychological category, replacing existing categories such as appetites, passions, sentiments and affections. By examining medieval and eighteenth-century theological psychologies and placing Charles Darwin and William James within a broader and more complex nineteenth-century setting, Thomas Dixon argues that this domination by one single descriptive category is not healthy. The over-inclusivity of ‘the emotions’ has hampered attempts to argue with any subtlety about the enormous range of mental states and stances of which humans are capable. This book is an important contribution to the debate about emotion and rationality which has preoccupied Western thinkers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which continues to have implications for contemporary debates.

Dr Thomas Dixon is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Faculty of Divinity and a Fellow of Churchill College, University of Cambridge.

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To my parents, Kay and Gordon Dixon

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A difference of words is, in this case, more than a mere verbal difference. Though it be not the expression of a difference of doctrine, it very speedily becomes so.

The first great subdivision, then, which I would form, of the internal class, is into our intellectual states of mind, and our emotions.

Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 100–2

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Note on quotations

In several cases, when quoting from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts (such as those by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Samuel Clarke and Francis Hutcheson), I have rendered the quotation in modern form, removing archaic spellings, capitalisations and italicisations.