

<p>e-Journal Philosophie der Psychologie</p>	<p>VALUING EMOTIONS Some Remarks on 'Emotion als Affekt' von Michael Stocker (Syracuse/New York)</p>
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I am very grateful to Dr. Martin Euringer for his presentation and discussion of some of my views on emotions, focusing on *Valuing Emotions*. In this brief comment, I will focus on some areas which may divide us, primarily his worries about my discussions of affectivity and, in particular, on my charging that many contemporary philosophers' account of affectivity suffer from circularity.

Early on, Dr. Euringer says that I hold that emotions are to be understood primarily in terms of affect. (This may explain why he focuses on my arguments about circularity.) But this was not my view. (I leave it to others whether what I said suggested this.) What I said (tried to say) was that many twentieth century philosophers fail to acknowledge that affectivity is a sui generis and essential feature of emotions. They hold, mistakenly in my view, that the affectivity of emotions can be understood in terms of various other essential and sui generis features of emotions, including reason (including beliefs) and desires. Where I was concerned to make this argument about affectivity, it was not because I think emotions are to be understood primarily in terms of affectivity, but because so many contemporary philosophers go wrong about affectivity and emotions.

Showing this was only one of my concerns – and, I think, it was given far less attention than showing some of the many ways emotions are evaluatively important. I think Dr. Euringer and I are in broad agreement about many of these ways. So, to continue to focus on what separates us, I think it would be most useful for me to explain why I was concerned with that argument about affectivity, its nature and its roles in emotions.

That argument was directed against a number of contemporary (so-called) analytic philosophers, also some (so-called) continental philosophers (pre-eminently Sartre), and Spinoza. Put very briefly, these contemporary philosophers reject identification of affectivity and emotions with bodily feelings; they also argue that affectivity and emotions have cognitive content (*ratio*) via constituent judgments, beliefs, and the like (perhaps with desires and the like). They, further, argue that emotions are nothing but the "carriers" of cognitive content (again, perhaps with desires). I largely agree with their first two claims; I reject their last one.

I do deny the importance of bodily feelings for emotions – as might be said, I argue for the sorts of accounts of emotions found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric* rather than those found in *De Anima* (e.g., boiling blood). I may be far too quick in dismissing the importance of the body or bodily feelings for emotions and affectivity. Perhaps this is a manifestation of my tendencies toward intellectualization (discussed in chap 3). Perhaps I am too impressed by Greek and our religious thoughts that immaterial beings, such as God (or gods) can have (various) emotions.

I argue for the importance of psychic (non-bodily) feelings and for the primordially and sui generis irreducibility of affectivity. In this, I think I join with many, if not the vast majority, of our philosophical predecessors, from Plato and Aristotle to Scheler and Heidegger (cf. *Sorge* and *Befindlichkeit*). (I include James here. As I argued, I think it mistaken to see him as understanding emotions in terms of bodily feelings.) I also thus join with nearly all psychoanalytic theorists. Because of their insistence on language-like structures and contents of the mind, Lacan and Lacanians, and followers of Donald Davidson, may be exceptions.

I argue that the philosophers who deny the irreducibility of affectivity – in particular, those who urge understanding it in terms of those carriers of cognitive content (and desires) – fail. They fail

either simply or because of circularity. The simple failure is that their accounts also fit what can be affectless. The circularity consists of offering what is affectively-laden (judgments, beliefs, desires, ...) in accounts which purport to reduce affectivity to what is non-affective. The circularity is relative to the goal these philosophers set themselves – in my terms, denying the irreducibility of affectivity. The reason I argue that they fail -- either simply or through circularity -- has to do with how showing this helps us understand affectivity and its various roles, especially in emotions.

Pitcher, for example, (discussed pp. 43-44) holds that hoping that P does not involve feelings, but rather is to be understood simply in terms of thinking that P is likely to happen and that this would (will) be good. But one can note with indifference, not hope, that P is likely and will be good: suppose that P is an impending marriage one reads about in a newspaper. Put briefly, unless one *cares* for those people, one need not hope that they will marry. Absent such care, one need not even be pleased (for them or simply) that they will marry. Other theorists fail by circularity: e.g., by denying the irreducibility of affectivity and urging us to understand it in terms of "hot" judgments (to use a term found in current academic psychology). What is important is not so much how these theorists fail or even that they fail. It is how we can use their failure to understand affectivity.

To continue with this, I will take up an example both Dr. Euringer and I discuss: a comparison of a person before and after he slips on ice. I use this to argue that we cannot understand emotions – here, the fear of slipping and the greater fear after slipping – in terms of beliefs and desires, unless they are understood as affectively-laden. I certainly agree with Dr. Euringer that even before he slips, a person walking on ice may be in any number of emotional states -- he may walk bravely, anxiously, resolutely, and so on. (Early in the work, around p. 8, I said I was inclined to accept the claim by Schachtel and Krystal and various other psychoanalysts that people are always in some affective, even some emotional, state or other.) The circularity I claimed was not holding that the walker was in an (just any) emotional state. It was holding that we could characterize his fear or his becoming more fearful in terms of (changes in) his beliefs and desires, where these are understood as non-affective. My claim was that these characterizations simply fail because they are cast in such terms as "He thinks he may slip", where one can think this without fear; or alternatively, they seem to succeed only because they, themselves, are understood as affectivity-laden, e.g., in terms such as "He now takes seriously the possibility of slipping". But for this to come even close to succeeding, *taking that thought seriously* involves taking it with certain emotions or certain strength of emotions.

One way I may sometimes have suggested that those characterizations simply fail is that this person may have those beliefs and desires and still not be in (come to have) that emotional state. What I meant – and what I needed to mean to be consistent with the psychoanalytic claim that we are always in some emotional state or other – is that, as beliefs and desires are understood by those philosophers, the person might well not be in (change to) that emotional state. I also suggested that I was inclined to hold that correct understandings of beliefs and desires, themselves, would have it that they, too, are affectively-laden. To the extent that this is how we should understand beliefs and desires, these philosophers cannot be understood as simply failing to give sufficient conditions for the emotion rather than failing by circularity. They will have to be understood as offering two somewhat different ways of being circular: the first by using beliefs and desires which, like all believings and desirings are affectively-laden (contrary to what these philosophers hold); the second by using special cases of beliefs and desires, viz., feeling-laden instances of them – such as hot judgments.

In many, perhaps most, cases, it will be difficult to tell whether a particular account simply fails or fails because of circularity. But this is unimportant. What is important is that it fails. What is still more important is what we learn about affectivity from the failure.

My charge that Sartre's use of the magical to characterize affectivity simply fails or is circular is an application of this general argument. It does not concern whether the magical world, or seeing it as magical, does or does not allow various a priori or epistemological conceptions of the world. It is, rather, that in his attempt to characterize affectivity in terms of a magical world, he either simply fails to characterize affectivity or alternatively his account is circular. It simply fails if one can affectlessly see a world as magical; it is circular if the magical must, itself, be understood as involving affectivity. For my purposes, it is unimportant which of these errors is Sartre's; or even whether they are really different alternatives or are only different ways of being circular (again, in terms of the goal he sets himself). So too, it is unimportant whether, given his views e.g., in his *Outline* or in *Being and Nothingness*, he had to, or should have, set himself that goal.

Dr. Euringer suggests a difficulty in my attempted distinction between seeing that something is interesting and being interested in it. (If he is right, it also shows a difficulty in my attempted distinction seeing that a world is magical and affectively experiencing it as magical.) Disagreeing with me (and I think Scheler for that matter), he holds that to see that something is interesting requires that one is interested in it. I think that there can be a difference between seeing that something is interesting and being interested in it. I may be interested in something but think, or even know, that it is not interesting: I am interested in what I see as not being interesting. This dual state might invite self-reflection or consultation with a psychoanalyst. In the end, I may conclude that I was really interested in something else. Or perhaps I may conclude that my thought that that is not interesting was based on the Aristotelian-like thought that a healthy person would not find it interesting (with the conclusion that I am not a healthy person). I might hold that only a very unimaginative person could be interested in something like this, which is, really, of no interest.

Going the other way, let us picture a person trying to decide which profession, say (philosophy, medicine, law, ...) to pursue. None of these is now of interest to her. But she wants her future life to be interesting. So she first eliminates those that (as she thinks) will not be interesting. But this may leave her with many possibilities all of which she thinks (perhaps correctly) are truly interesting. She isn't yet interested in any of them. Having seen that philosophy is truly interesting, is of interest (as such or to a person like her), even though she is not now interested in it, she is pleased to start her studies in it.

What I just said is too brief. There is the more general problem generated by the following claim: in order to know that something is interesting, say, or to know what it is for something to be interesting, I must be (have been) interested in something or other; to know what interest is, to speak intelligibly and intelligently about interest, I must have experienced interest. I am doubtful about this claim, but I do not have any firm views on this. And even if it is necessary for something as general as interest, it does not seem necessary for more specific emotions. So, I think a young person can fear that, like his grandmother, his old age will be filled with a certain range of emotions that she now suffers but that he has not yet experienced at all. When, as may happen, he does start to suffer them, he can (intelligibly and intelligently) say, "This is what I was afraid of. Now I see that I was right to fear it." To be sure, to understand what he has not (yet) experienced, it may well be necessary that he have experienced certain other emotions. But, so far as I can see, not those.

There are two other points I want to comment on: As Dr. Euringer notes, in "Emotional Thoughts" I suggested that an emotion does not require *beliefs*: so for example, on my way to the airport, I can worry that I don't have my ticket, even though I checked only a few moments ago and even though, for that reason, I do not believe that I have lost it. Dr. Euringer asks whether I can be *certain* that I still have the ticket. He suggests that since I cannot be certain, then for all I have said, I can have the (or a) relevant belief.

I think, however, we are in agreement here. For as I could have put my claim, my cognitive state can be far weaker than a *belief*, it might be only a *worry*. Alternatively put, I believe that I might, just possibly, have misplaced the ticket, or I believe that it is within the realm of what is metaphysically possible that it has suddenly disappeared. My using 'belief' here does not go back on my claim that beliefs are not necessary. For I do not worry that the ticket might just possibly have disappeared. I worry that it has disappeared. What is here important is that the belief that *it has disappeared* is unnecessary. The belief that *metaphysically speaking, it might have disappeared* is not a constituent of, or even a ground for, the worry my example concerns. That belief is the constituent or ground of what some (perhaps unfairly) call an existential or philosophical worry, a worry that is a correlate of the question of why, metaphysically speaking, there is something rather than nothing.

In response to my claim that certain ways of (not) experiencing an emotion "can be a moral fault ... or show insincerity ... or that the emotion did not go deep enough or ..." [my page 154], Dr. Euringer raises various questions, e.g., Do we have the right to judge, Is there a duty to mourn, Don't you have the right to get rid of this bad emotion as fast as you can? As I read him, he thinks I make mistakes in giving certain answers to his questions. We may disagree about what the right answers are. This is not unimportant. But what is, I think, more important is whether such questions are raised by (can be raised in regard to) emotions.

Putting it this way may be unfair to Dr. Euringer. He can be taken as saying that if such questions can be raised, they can be raised only in regard to the rational components – what some would call the beliefs – of the emotions. I disagree. I do agree that an "episode" of anger or mourning or ... can be criticized on the grounds that its constituent or grounding beliefs are mistaken: "he didn't mean to insult you", "what he said was directed not at you or anyone close to you", and so on. But with Aristotle and many psychoanalytically inclined theorists, I also think that it can be criticized on its extent (relative to those beliefs or not): "even if he did mean to insult you, it wasn't serious enough to try to kill him, or even to entertain murderous thoughts", "if you do get enraged when a student disagrees with you, you should seek help (or perhaps think of another profession)". Or on the other side, "if that didn't even annoy you, much less get you furious, I wonder whether you've weakened, perhaps lost, your commitment to your family", and so on.