

# RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS' EMOTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Recent philosophical work on responsibility for emotion has tended to focus on what responsibility we can have for our own emotions. Folk psychology suggests we can also be responsible for others' emotions, and they for ours, and that this can be reason for praise or blame. However, many branches of applied (and popular) psychology, and some schools of philosophy, deny there can be interpersonal responsibility for emotion. I shall be arguing here against this view, and for an account on which we can, albeit in varying degrees and on some rather diverse grounds, be responsible for each others' emotions.

**Keywords:** emotion, responsibility, ethics

## 1. *An initial caveat*

As anyone familiar with the recent philosophical and other literature on emotions will be aware, there is considerable disagreement as to what emotions are<sup>1</sup>, which in turn makes a difference to who, if anyone, can be responsible for them, on what grounds, to what extent, and so on; nor is the literature on responsibility the place to look for any widespread agreement. I will not try to settle any of these issues here – that would be a foolhardy ambition indeed – but I will try to map out the options on both issues, of emotion and of responsibility, and to show how these options align across the two issues, as clearly as possible, and hopefully so as to also be useful to those who might not share my views as to which are the most plausible options.

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<sup>1</sup> Some philosophers have also argued that the phenomena we call emotions do not actually form a natural class at all – notably, Amelie Rorty (introduction to Rorty 1980), on conceptual grounds, and Paul Griffiths (Griffiths 1997), on empirical grounds.

## 2. *Are we responsible for others' emotions? Some basic options*

Before going into any further depth about how to understand responsibility, and what difference it makes what emotions are, let us outline some possible views of responsibility for others' emotions. The positions outlined below are deliberately schematic, representing the main logical options rather than a classification of actual views, although versions of them may be found in both folk psychology and academic literature.

The first is what I shall call the *chaos-model*: nobody can be responsible for their own or others' emotions. This fits with certain traditional assumptions about emotions as uncontrollable, irruptive forces, unbound by the will and reason of those that feel them, let alone the will and reason of other people. Admittedly, it sits rather uneasily with some of the available evidence, since emotions themselves, as well as emotion-based behaviours, are demonstrably amenable to conditioning, particularly in formative years, by both oneself and others, from brute behavioural modification to subtler cultural influences. That it may be hard to control occurrent emotions, or entrenched emotional dispositions (e.g. irritability, fearfulness), directly and immediately is another matter; but control need not be defined only in such terms<sup>2</sup>.

A second option we could call the *burdened hostage* model. Here, there is interpersonal responsibility only: people "push each others' buttons" – I am responsible for your feelings and you for mine, but neither of us is responsible for our own feelings. On the one hand, this model, like the chaos-model, is undermined by apparent and not infrequent cases of individual emotional self-control. Intrapersonal control implies at least the possibility of intra-personal responsibility, and also implies a limitation on how far we are truly hostage to others in our emotional lives. On the other hand, if the emotional impact we have on each other is purely random, then this model effectively collapses back into the chaos model.

A third option is the reverse of the burdened hostage model: here, there is intrapersonal responsibility only. Each of us is responsible for his or her own emotions, and nobody is responsible for anyone else's. I shall call this the *stoic model*, the lower-case stoicism implying a degree of looseness in its fit with the exact views of the historical Stoics, to which it nevertheless bears a notable likeness. It resembles the chaos-model in denying interpersonal responsibility for emotion; it sharply contrasts with it in affirming intrapersonal responsibility. Moreover, proponents of this kind of model tend to deny interpersonal responsibility precisely *by* affirming intrapersonal responsibility: the more responsible each of us is for his or her own emotions, the less responsibility

<sup>2</sup> Note also that the chaos-model is at odds with both the idea of emotions being biologically hard-wired (which implies order and predictability of a sort, albeit not one entirely subject to our control or choice) *and* the idea that emotions are socially constructed (which implies a degree of intersubjective constraint). It is also, unless we use a very peculiar notion of cognition, at odds with the idea that emotions are like cognitions such as beliefs and judgments, which are not usually thought of as chaotic or irruptive states, except when dealing with particularly unfortunate pathologies (e.g. *idées fixes*).

for those feelings can be attributed to other people. This model is my main target here: I will examine it more closely shortly.

The fourth option would be *mixed or qualified models*; not chaotic, but still more complicated than the hostage/stoic models, they will allow, in varying degrees and kinds, and on varying grounds, for both intrapersonal and interpersonal responsibility for emotions. Mixed, because they affirm more than one possible kind and locus of responsibility; qualified, insofar as it seems likely (even with hesitations about treating responsibility-assignment as zero-sum) that allowing responsibility to be shared will mean each individual's share is by that token diminished. I will not try to set out in full what the preferred version of such a model should be here; instead, I will set out some suggestions as to how it could be developed, not just negatively, through the rejection of the stoic model, but also by pointing to available tools for negotiating interpersonal responsibility for emotions that the strong intrapersonal focus of the stoic model might blind us to.

### 3. *Responsibility for others' emotions: what could it mean?*

Of the options outlined above, only the chaos-model seems to imply there can be *no* responsibility for emotion: the other three differ as to the *locus* of responsibility. What could it mean, then, to claim that someone is responsible for another's emotions? What kind of claim (assuming that it is always the same kind of claim, which it may not be) are people making when they say things like "You make me happy" or (sincerely or sarcastically as the case may be) "Thanks, you've made me feel much better", or "Now look what you've done, you've upset him"?

One way to understand such claims is *causal*: if someone makes you happy, or angry, they are somehow causing your happiness, or your anger. Of course, this is not necessarily sufficient (and may not always be necessary) for attributing responsibility. This may partly be a matter of proportion: how *much* of a role did you, your actions, and so on, really play in causing my emotions? On the other hand, could I, examining the matter counterfactually, have been just as upset, happy or scared (and in relevantly similar ways) without you? Could not much if not all of my emotional state in fairness be attributed causally to myself (my attitudes, beliefs, and so on) rather than you?

A second way of understanding the claim is what we could call a *voluntarist* one<sup>3</sup>. Here, in judging issues of responsibility, we look to the agent's state of mind as well as, and perhaps even in place of, their causal role in bringing about an outcome. So it would matter, in deciding whether I am responsible for your emotional state, not just whether

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<sup>3</sup> The three-way distinction used here is broadly owed (with no imputation of responsibility) to the discussion in Ripstein 1999, especially section 1.5. Fuller discussion of recent debates on responsibility than the outline here can be found at e.g. Fischer 1999 and Fischer and Ravizza 1998.

I had a causal role in bringing it about, but also whether my doing so was intentional, deliberate, and carried out with relevant knowledge and foresight (your emotional reactions might be random, idiosyncratic or paradoxical, and thwart my attempts at influence). Issues of control are emphasized, often by appeal to counterfactuals: could I, if I had wanted to, have avoided upsetting you? And if so, what was within my control – your emotional reactions to particular “triggers”, or just whether or not I set off those triggers by what I did and how I did it? Voluntarists may vary considerably as to which of these factors are taken into account, on how they are understood, and on how, if plural factors are of importance, they are understood to be related.

Voluntaristic notions of responsibility may not be strongly focused on outcomes: I may be blameworthy for *wanting* to upset you, even if I do not in fact act on the desire, or even if, acting on the desire, I fail to bring it about that you are upset. I may even, on a very strict, purely voluntaristic account, be blameworthy for harbouring such a desire even if there is no possibility whatsoever of my achieving such an effect, as long as I am not sufficiently deluded about my desire to disqualify me from responsibility through mental incompetence.

Both the causal and the voluntarist types of account focus on broadly speaking factual issues, however elusive sure indicators of causal role, intention and so on may turn out to be. A third main way of understanding claims of responsibility is *normative*. Those who take such approaches may be inexplicit, or explicitly agnostic, about issues such as free will, counterfactuals, control, or causal role and efficacy. For example, P.F. Strawson’s (1974) treatment of responsibility-issues in terms of two contrasting stances, the objective and the participant reactive, explicitly aims to base the discussion of praise and blame (moral and otherwise) on “important commonplaces” about our normative practices rather than on final answers to metaphysical conundrums.

This is not to say factual points play *no* part in such attributions of praise and blame (assessment of someone’s stage of mental development might, for instance, be a crucial factor in deciding whether and how they are to be held responsible), but that the primary considerations are not factual, but normative. My intentions, my actions and the outcomes of my actions matter insofar as they affect my normative standing, but the reason for caring about it is not purely given by the facts; rather, it is given by the protected interests of the parties involved.

Moreover, while responsibility in this sense may be crucially sensitive to issues of causal role and voluntary agency, these connections are not ones of straightforward dependence in particular cases. For instance, if I owe it to you to promote your welfare, emotional and otherwise, and you are suffering, the question is not so much whether I caused your present misfortune, voluntarily or otherwise, as whether I am not blameworthy if I pass by on the other side while you suffer. If you are my friend and someone has upset you, I may owe it to you to try and help you feel better, even if I was not the one who upset you. Granted, if I should be entirely incapable of doing something

about it, that might exculpate me (at least as long as my inability is not itself culpable). However, neither my (lack of) causal role in your plight, nor my causal (in)efficacy in alleviating it, are in themselves the main issue. Similarly, while my intentions, volitions, knowingness, skill and so forth may make an important difference on a normative account of responsibility (I may be angrier if I think you deliberately upset me, or tried to, than if you were just accidentally insensitive), they will not be the whole story, and may even work in reverse (I may think that your carelessness about how you affect me emotionally is in some ways worse than if you paid enough attention to me to be deliberately upsetting).

#### ***4. Responsibility and the four models***

Even the chaos-model seems to allow for responsibility in the purely causal sense, as long as this responsibility through causal role is unmitigated by further considerations of the kinds used by voluntarists. So in the chaos-model, such responsibility as we might have for our own or others' emotions could only, it seems, be attributed through strict liability: if you caused it, even in the most non-voluntarist sense, it's your responsibility. Of course, this picture – lack of control, combined with strict liability – is unlikely to appeal to any but the most moral risk-loving, and so the chaos model seems likely to incline to a no-responsibility (intrapersonal or interpersonal) view about emotions than to attributions of responsibility.

The burdened hostage model, unless it is to collapse into a more limited form of the chaos-model, implies a degree of control in relation to how we affect others' emotions. On this model, interpersonal responsibility is assumed, but, again, unless the emotions of others are fully controllable and predictable by us, it will be a hard responsibility to manage, particularly while we lack similar control over our own emotions. This point is further compounded by the fact that a very significant part of our emotional lives is about reactions to the – perceived or real – emotions of others. If you cannot control your anger, and your anger makes me afraid, are you responsible for my fear, given that you cannot control the thing that set it off? Clearly, you could try to suppress expression of your anger, but there may be giveaways, particularly if I know you well. The overall picture that emerges is a somewhat unappealing cross between a Mexican standoff (you can push my buttons, but I can push yours right back) and Russian roulette (since none of us can quite predict the outcome, or control our own outputs), with room for additional complications from unpredictable asymmetries between players in terms of both power and susceptibility – complications that the standoff-roulette features of the situation in their turn make less manageable still.

The two first models, then, seem at least on the face of it rather implausible as well as unappealing. How do the stoic and mixed models fare?

## 5. *When nobody can make you feel anything, and vice versa: the stoic model expanded*

The most compelling version of the stoic account available within philosophy seems to me to be the one implicit in at least the late Roman version of Stoicism, in writers like Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca. I shall not here try to do justice to the precise views of any one of these authors, but rather to sketch a general account that has elements of views found in all of them, even if it might not be exactly the view of any one of them<sup>4</sup>. The account consists of both descriptive and normative assumptions; I shall start with the descriptive.

First, then, the stoic account assumes that our own emotions are within our voluntary control. More specifically, there is no emotion without assent to the appearance that something outside your control is important for your flourishing. So, for instance, if I am hurt by your apparent indifference, I am assenting not only to the appearance that your attitude is in fact as I perceive it, but also, more crucially, to the proposition that your having such an attitude matters. It is this second assumption that makes the reaction emotional, and that makes it this particular emotional reaction.

According to the stoic account, assenting to, rejecting or suspending judgments of this kind are all options within our voluntary control. I could decide that your attitude does not matter; I could suspend judgment as to whether it does, or I could decide to let it matter. Without assent, on the accounts of at least some Stoics, there is only “pre-emotion”, an impulse whose presence and specific form may not be a matter of choice, at the species or individual level of those that feel it; a stoic might concede a degree of what we would now call hard-wiring in this respect, let alone further pernicious influences from bad nurture. However, Seneca explicitly argues in *De Ira* that emotion proper is only present once you assent to the relevant (evaluative) appearance, and that this is a voluntary matter. The position may be equivocal as to how this assent relates to the emotion itself; the relation may be seen as one of necessary condition (no emotion without the relevant judgment), of sufficient condition, of necessary and sufficient condition, or of identity<sup>5</sup>. However this precise point is cashed out, the picture that emerges is that emotion is a voluntary matter, dependent on the voluntary assent to a species of normative judgment.

<sup>4</sup> The account of Stoic views offered below, while not meant to offer strict exegesis, draws on primary texts by the cited authors and also on the readings of these offered by e.g. Sorabji 2000, and Nussbaum 1994, 2001. A reading on similar lines can be found in Herman 1997, discussing the Stoics in the context of a broader comparison of Kantian and Aristotelian views. For further discussion of Stoic views and their modern implications, see also Reydams-Schils 2005, and Engstrom and Whiting (eds.) 1988. For two non-Stoic accounts of emotions that broadly replicate the voluntarist “judgmentalism” of the stoic position as outlined here, see also Sartre 1962 and Solomon 1993. Solomon and Nussbaum, while they both endorse descriptive accounts of emotion similar to those outlined below, both claim reservations about the normative, eliminativist aspect of Stoic views on emotions (i.e. that we would be better off without them): Sartre’s position on this issue is arguably equivocal.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Nussbaum 1994, 2001 for discussions of this point.

Note that this voluntariness need not apply to all judgments: the Stoic consensus seems to have been that truth, if grasped, compels belief. However, an idea that can be doubted, conversely, such as the idea that what is outside my control can impact on my flourishing – is one to which assent can be withheld or suspended. Moreover, the idea that my flourishing can depend on what is outside my control is, according to the Stoics, outright false; and it should therefore be possible to reject this altogether, eliminating emotions in the process. It is conceded that this will not be the work of a moment, since coming to this realization will involve overcoming social conditioning and all our more “animal” tendencies of attachment to externals. Nor is the process of liberation from this state of error altogether one of attending to rational argument; although the Stoics provide a number of therapeutic arguments, they also offer more practical exercises, both cognitive and behavioural, designed to change our habits of mind and strengthen the will against error, if we were to just follow them consistently and mindfully. *The Manual of Epictetus* is, from one point of view, simply a collection of such exercises, and so, perhaps less directly, are the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.

The most basic assumption that underpins the stoic position is that flourishing is virtue, which is living according to reason or nature. Furthermore, this flourishing is within our reach; all we need is virtue, and our virtue can only be judged on what we can control. The externals, the things that are outside our control, cannot affect our virtue, and since our flourishing is our virtue, externals cannot affect our flourishing. As a minor accommodation to our tendency to act as if some externals *are* important to our flourishing (our nearest and dearest, for instance, and their happiness, and their attitudes towards us), the Stoics introduce the somewhat curious category of “preferred indifferents”, which acknowledges a preference, whilst retaining the basic position that these *are* indifferents, from which at least some degree of detachment is, normatively, still preferable<sup>6</sup>.

A number of further points, moreover, seem to tell in favour of unqualified withholding or rejection of assent to emotion-judgments. It might be thought, for instance, that getting rid of *all* emotions would be going unnecessarily far, and that we could and should only get rid of the “bad” ones. But emotions, the Stoics argue, are interconnected. If you care about what good or bad befalls you, or others, you expose yourself to a whole range of emotions; if you care about present and past (apparent) good or bad, you will feel happiness and unhappiness, and so on; if you care about the future, you will feel fear and desire. And it is unlikely that, having opened up such a general vulnerability to the world, that we will be able to calibrate it so as to switch it on and off (or up and down in strength) entirely at will.

Emotions also tend toward excess: if I allow myself to think of things outside my control as important to my flourishing, then given the degree of impact some such things

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<sup>6</sup> For a quick test of how stoical your nearest and dearest are, and how stoical they are prepared for you to be, try this position out on them.

can have (the loss of a loved one, for instance), emotion is not easily kept on a low burner. While assent is voluntary, moreover, once assent to emotion is given, reason's control is undermined; jumping off the cliff, emotionally speaking, may be a matter of choice, but that does not mean the choice, once made, is easily reversible.

These problems reinforce each other: the interconnectedness of emotions makes the tendency to excess and the loss of control affect us in a more pervasive manner; the tendency to excess heightens the effects of emotions wherever they obtain; the loss of rational voluntary control makes reining the emotions back in harder, if not altogether impossible.

For these more pragmatic reasons, then, as well as for the normative ones, it seems that the general elimination of emotion is the preferable solution. A less-favoured second-string move is to transform emotion by what would now be called cognitive re-labelling or reframing, changing the kind or intensity of emotion felt by changing how the situation is perceived. So Epictetus suggests overcoming the frustration of being stuck in a crowd by pretending you are at a festival, possibly by outright use of the "acting as if" method (in effect, re-construing the fact that you are stuck in place and crowded in on all sides from a negative to a positive, although he says nothing about the likely reaction from the rest of the crowd to your suddenly waving your hands in the air like you just don't care)<sup>7</sup>.

Basically, then, on the Stoic account, other people are not responsible for your emotions, and (by implication, unless we allow significant self/other asymmetries) you are not responsible for theirs. Note that this is not intended as a negation of moral duties regarding how you treat others (or they you): it is intended only as a denial that an agent's flourishing, or the virtue of an agent's attitudes and behaviours (both of which are within their control) can depend on the actions and reactions of others (which are not). We are neither burdened nor victimised, nor is the world of emotions one of chaos – unless we let these things be so, which we need not. And it is still wrong to harm others, or to adopt cruel or uncaring attitudes toward them, or for them to do this to you, for all that neither side can truly affect the other's flourishing. To do harm or intend harm (however ineffectively) to another is to do harm to yourself, to your own virtue and flourishing, introducing discord in your own soul, and setting yourself against the way things are (e.g. my enemy is currently unharmed, and this state of affairs strikes me as unsatisfactory and to be substituted for one in which he is in agony). Recasting the argument in Kantian terms, we have an indirect duty to ourselves not to be vicious to others.

<sup>7</sup> The second-string move is, on the other hand, typically favoured over complete detachment by current proponents of stoic models of interpersonal emotion-responsibility, notably the cognitive-behavioural therapy approach of Albert Ellis (Ellis 1988, 2001) and Aaron Beck (Beck 2000, 1978).

## 6. *Against the stoic account*

By contrast with the chaos-model and the burdened hostage model, the stoic model may seem a very appealing one. It does not burden us with unmanageable responsibilities: it gives each of us a sphere of responsibility that matches what we can control; in this sphere (and in this sphere only) can we obtain true and secure happiness. Moreover, the stoic account provides an intelligible descriptive basis for intrapersonal responsibility: emotions are not uncontrollable brute impulses, but dependent on, maybe even identical with, a type of voluntary value-judgments. However, there are, I shall argue, some significant arguments that can be raised against the Stoic account.

### 6.1. *Arguments from emotion-work*

An initial consideration that works against the stoic model comes from the efficacy of what sociologists call emotion-work (Hochschild 1979, 2003); the ways in which we manage our own and others' emotions. The classical examples in Hochschild's landmark study *The Managed Heart* are from service industry workers, notably flight attendants' accounts of how they manage their own stress and that of passengers during work. A range of different techniques might be employed: verbal cues, including careful use of tone of voice; careful use of body language, cognitive reframing (e.g. seeing the irate passenger as if he were an upset child, not a hostile adult); the main point being that the technique works, albeit often to some considerable cost to the one deploying it: this is, in its own way, as hard a labour as any<sup>8</sup>.

The possibility of emotion-work comes in the first instance from the fact that we can have an emotional impact on one another, by our actions and our attitudes. However, we can also (and this is what allows emotion-work to be something other than a wild gamble) cause others' emotions with a considerable, if defeasible, degree of reliable, foreseeable connection between intent and outcome. Given this, we can also make reasonable attributions (if usually qualified ones) of responsibility on a voluntarist model.

Granted, the empirical evidence suggests that emotion-work can be a chancy business: we may irritate when we try to soothe, amuse when we try to frighten, upset when we intend to provide a bracing reality check, and so on. Even the most skilled may find themselves with unexpected results; the idiosyncrasies and other particularities of both the emotion-worker and the worked-on may trip up the intended result; situational factors, preceding moods, or for that matter, a sudden realization and resentment by the worked-on of being "managed", all these can put spokes in the wheels.

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<sup>8</sup> For some indications of how emotion-work functions, from outside of the main emotion-work literature, see e.g. papers by Laird and Apostoleris, Fridlund and Duchayne, and Oatley, in Harre and Parrot 1996.

However, incomplete control/predictability is not *no* control/predictability; we need not lapse back into full-on chaos or burdened hostage mode. Contra the chaos-model, the possibility of emotion-work suggests that emotions, our own and others', are not simply brute, out-of-control forces. Contra the burdened hostage model, it suggests that there is both intrapersonal and interpersonal manageability for emotions, albeit that neither may be unlimited, and that people may vary considerably as to whether they are better at managing themselves or others in this way.

## 6.2. Responsibility as what we owe each other, again

What about the third way of understanding responsibility: the normative? Note that this is not absent on the stoic account, though it may appear strangely neutered by atomism. However, it also increases, if we allow two further points that a Stoic might want to resist. Firstly, human flourishing is not entirely within our control as individuals. Each of us has only limited powers, and these may not be adequate for flourishing. One result of this is that we are to a large extent dependent on the aid of others. (Though of course even with this, and even with the aid of *all* others, bad things might still happen to us.)

Now, the stoic does not deny that e.g. disease, natural disasters, ostracism, the loss of loved ones, and so on, may be experienced negatively. What they deny is that these things can really matter, since they are outside our control. Secondly, they deny that experiencing these things as bad is inevitable: our reactions *are* within our control. This has a certain strategic appeal: make your happiness dependent only on what you can control. If something is not within your control, refuse to experience it negatively, and do so by refusing to judge it negatively or acting towards it as if it were negative. This in turn reinforces an atomistic approach to individuals: there is my agency and your agency, my flourishing and your flourishing; to allow that there might be our, yours-and-mine flourishing, or our agency, is to move into a risky territory. However, this is the territory that we in fact occupy: none of us is self-sufficient, and we can affect each other, for better and for worse.

Note also the potentially troubling implications of the stoic approach for moral agency. If others' flourishing cannot depend on what is outside their control, such as my viciousness, kindness and so forth, while my flourishing *does* depend on my viciousness and so forth, my behaving well towards you seems a matter oddly detached from *you*. This does not mean that there is no moral impact of my actions and attitudes towards you; but its specifically *moral* impact is all from its wrongness towards *myself*. For, if we concede that I can impede your flourishing, or aid it, then we must allow that your flourishing is not just a matter of what you can control, nor just a matter of your own agency.

### 6.3. *Some problems with stoic descriptive assumptions about emotion*

The descriptive claims of the stoic account as outlined above come in three steps. First, a voluntarist judgmentalist account of what emotions are; second, an assumption that this means we have, or could achieve, intrapersonal control of our emotions; third, an assumption that this means that responsibility for emotions is intrapersonal rather than interpersonal.

However, judgmentalist accounts of emotion face considerable challenges. The view that emotions are identical with, or depend on, judgments appears to be contradicted by the not uncommon experience of having an emotion while judging that it lacks warrant. Many common phobias – fear of uncontroversially non-dangerous spiders, vertigo, etc. – persist in the face of contrary judgments. So the judgmentalist about emotion must either hold that there is a “hidden” judgment that contradicts the overt one, or posit an internal division in the judging self to accommodate such cases. Judgmentalist accounts may also have trouble accommodating the emotions of animals and small children, neither of which are generally held capable of a level of conceptual and rational thought required to have judgments. The emotional response to an event such as the loss of a loved one may also, as David Pugmire (Pugmire 1998) argues, be significantly different and appear disconnected, even over time, from the way that the event is processed at the level of beliefs and judgments. These disanalogies suggest that, while emotions may be more “cognitive”, or more like perceptions<sup>9</sup>, than a “brute feeling” account of them would hold, they are still a distinct, possibly *sui generis*, form of cognition or perception – like other forms in some respects, but not all, and displaying variable degrees of integration with them.

Moreover, the stoic account may be problematic even if we concede the descriptive assumptions about emotions that underpin it. Even judgmentalism need not imply full voluntarily intrapersonal control. To begin with, it is not clear that judgments are subject to voluntary control in any deeper sense, nor that it would be a good thing if they were. As Williams (1973b, 1973c) argues, there is something disturbing, as well as implausible, about an account of judgments that suggests they can be made at will – that I could for instance, given the right incentives (money, spiritual salvation, social advantage, survival, the cessation of mistreatment) make a judgment that flew in the face of the evidence. Even if judgments – in particular, value-judgments – *were* voluntary in this sense, it is not clear that this would allow the level of individualism about whether to have them and what form to give them that is an implicit necessity in the stoic account.

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<sup>9</sup> For discussions of the range of meanings intended by the rather vague term “cognitive”, see e.g. Roberts 1988, Armon-Jones 1991 (especially the first chapter), Deigh 1994. For discussions of problems raised by “strong” cognitive accounts, see also Robinson 1995 and Roberts 1996. For further objections based on the sidelining of the feeling-element in emotion by judgmentalist accounts, see Stocker 2003, Leighton 1984, 1988, and Goldie 2002. For discussion of models of emotion that are perceptual rather than cognitive, see also Charland 1997, Tappolet 2000 and Prinz 2006.

Emotions, on any cognitive reading, are crucially dependent on (perceived) significance, on meaning: it is seeing-as (threatening, pleasant, unfair, and so on) that makes a particular object the object of the particular emotion that it elicits. However, meaning is not a radically private matter: there is an implicit intersubjectivity to any account of emotion that does not see emotions as simply brute, private feelings. However, this puts considerable, if broad, limits on the extent to which emotion-related meaning could be a matter of individual choice. Not everything makes a viable object for an emotion, and not under just any description; while some combinations of emotions and elicitors may mystify, they rarely do so radically, any more than appetites (often supposed to be more brute still) typically exhibit the randomness of Anscombe's (1957) man who "just wants" a saucer of mud. Radical choice about what to feel about any particular stimulus would, at the extreme, amount to a claim that there could be an equivalent of a private language for emotion-meanings<sup>10</sup>. Emotions crucially function as communications and responses to communications, both towards others (my fear represents you as a threat) and towards the self (my fear represents its object as a threat and myself as someone vulnerable to it) (Oatley 1996). This is also an aspect emphasized by early philosophical accounts of emotion, for instance in Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*, which provides, through an analysis of the conceptual structure of different emotion-types, a manual in how to understand – and exploit – the communicative implications of emotions. Present yourself to the jury as indignant on your client's behalf over the charges levied against him, and, if successful, you cast the trial as a violation of justice and your client as an innocent.

The point here is that this implies that even if emotions are like judgments, this does not mean that the emotional sphere is one of radical individual voluntarism; at most, it is a sphere allowing some latitude for individual control within an intersubjective space structured by implicitly intersubjective rules. We should note, also, that the Stoic account seems to accept this, as some modern, lower-case stoic accounts, such as those of contemporary self-help manuals, may not: the former advocates stepping out of the game altogether, because entering implies heteronomy<sup>11</sup>; the latter tries to offer a version where you can enter the game and still keep your individual autonomy in some radical sense.

This is not simply a matter of the way in which each particular judgment or judgment-analogue is constrained by intersubjectivity: it is also a matter of the interdependence of different judgments or judgment-analogues. One way to understand this might be in terms of narrative conventions, for instance role. Occupying the role of friend, for instance, brings with it certain expectations of how you will react across different situa-

<sup>10</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether there could be private languages at all, the point here is that it seems implausible, on the available evidence, that there is such a thing with respect to human emotions, incomprehensible as our own and others' feelings may sometimes appear to us.

<sup>11</sup> See also Wollheim 1999, especially Chapter 3, for a discussion of the heteronomy of moral emotions.

tions; say, if someone insults your friend, or helps them. So having made one choice of role may already – at least if you wish to sustain the role – constrain you and guide you in a particular direction across different situations. In other words, we do not typically make the choices, insofar as they are choices, in isolation from each other: rather, we make big (and often messy) clusters of choices, on terms that are at least in principle shareable by other agents, and in ways shaped by the preceding choices of other agents as well as our own individual earlier choices.

All this, of course, before also taking into account the possibility that our emotional natures, both generally (our having emotions at all) and specifically (our having particular emotions, and towards particular objects) may be to a considerable extent a matter of our biological nature, and of its hardwired aspects at that. Such an account need not be a non-cognitive one, nor need it exclude room for social and cultural factors to play a significant part in shaping our emotional lives, but the kind of cognition involved in emotion on this account would be a rather different one than either an account of emotions as rationally or voluntarily selected judgments, or for that matter an account viewing emotions as purely socially constructed judgments<sup>12</sup>.

## 7. *Managing emotion-responsibility*

If the criticisms of the stoic account above hold, then, *whether* to have emotions may not be fully within our control, individually or as a species, and *which* emotions to have may not be fully within our control, either. And this is so for two main reasons. The first is that while emotions, for the most part, fall short of either of the extremes of brute chaotic feeling and voluntary rational judgment, occupying instead a tricky and *sui generis* middle ground between the two. The second is that human individuals, while distinguishable, are not atomistically self-contained and self-sufficient, either as perceivers, reasoners and feelers, or as flourishers: we are, as Aristotle would have it, rational social creatures, with important connections and dependencies between the rational and the social aspects of our natures. We can and (arguably unavoidably) do affect each other, emotionally, and the way in which we do so is in large part predictable and controllable – emotion-work is possible, and so, by extension, are emotion-work related duties.

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<sup>12</sup> A further possibly relevant point here is the recent empirical literature on the existence of so-called mirror neurons in humans, a discovery which may point to a neurological basis for empathy, and conversely, in cases of non-standard functioning of the mirror neurons, to a neurological basis for autistic spectrum disorders. More to the immediate point, mirror neurons suggest a mechanism for the interpersonal transmission of emotion: seeing (or even hearing) another expressing an emotion tends to set off a “mirroring” response in oneself. It falls outside the scope of this paper to fully take explore this issue, but see e.g. Dapretto 2005, Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004, Oberman et al. 2005 and Ramachandran 2006. For a discussion of different ways of understanding (and more generally accessing), the emotions of others, see e.g. Goldie 2002, ch. 5.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the specifics of such duties would be simple to work out. Suppose, for example, that we are dealing with a long-standing and occasionally fraught sibling relationship, where Bart, the older brother, tends to be somewhat insensitive and brusque, and Lisa, the younger sister, tends to be somewhat touchy and earnest. In assigning responsibility for the smooth functioning of the sibling relationship, how do we factor in the point that Bart's insensitivity and Lisa's sensitivity may *both* seem excessive (as well as likely to be mutually reinforcing each other)? Can Lisa legitimately demand that Bart try to be less insensitive only up to the point where someone more averagely sensitive than Lisa would react to his taunts? Is Bart only culpable for those cases of hurt feelings on his sister's part that do not reflect her rather excessive-seeming earnestness in response to his flippancy? How would we set reasonable benchmarks for sensitivity, anyway? How much does it matter that Bart and Lisa are still children? Does the age-difference make a difference to how much each of them owes the other? Does the fact that Lisa is somewhat better at empathizing and thinking ahead than Bart, and has generally better self-control, mean that she has heavier emotion-work duties since she has greater skill? Does it make any difference to what they owe each other that their relationship is one of being siblings, and not of being classmates or friends? If Lisa makes a heroic and one-sided effort to improve their relationship by becoming less touchy, while Bart remains unchanged, is this supererogatory emotion-work on Lisa's part? Is Bart, to use Bartky's (Bartky 2002) term, emotionally exploitative, at least in a passive sense, reaping unearned benefits from Lisa's emotion-work without rewarding the effort of the worker? What emotion-work should the parents encourage their children to engage in, and (seeing that the ideal held up might be far unreachable), what could they reasonably expect of their children? How much would the answer vary depending on the circumstances surrounding any particular interaction (for instance, if Lisa has just had a particularly trying day at school, and snaps more easily at Bart as a result)?

But note that while answering these kinds of questions is not straightforward, these are not entirely uncharted waters: these kinds of questions will be familiar to most from everyday interactions with others. Folk theories, at least, seem to exist, but disciplines such as law and rhetoric from their beginnings also deal with these issues – for instance, the vexed question of whether to allow provocation defences, and if so, on what grounds, by whom, and in which particular kinds of cases, signally turn on interpersonal ascriptions of emotion-responsibility, although of course they go beyond them into issues of action-responsibility. Could someone so offend you that you would be justified in – or could be excused for – behaviour that would not be justified or excused if the offender did not elicit certain emotions in you? Note that if the answer to either is yes, we are moving away from the stoic account again, into messier territory. The distribution of responsibility between persons need not be simple, or zero-sum: less responsibility on one side need not mean more on the other. (That someone caused offence might, under some circumstances, exculpate your reaction without inculpating the offender – they

might themselves be under strain, they might have meant no offence, and so on.) The point is that these kinds of calibrations – which also serve to guide our deliberations before the fact – can only apply within a framework that acknowledges that there can be interpersonal responsibility for emotion.

Moreover, some hope of systematizing relevant points exists. Ronald de Sousa offers the concept of what he calls an ideology of emotion: “what we learn, in the process of being socialised, about (an) emotion: its moral and social significance, its place in the hierarchy of human states and capacities” (De Sousa 1980, p. 278). Properly developed, on the descriptive and normative levels, a more scientific (in the broad sense) version of such an ideology (if possible) would allow us to navigate the difficult territories of interpersonal responsibility for emotions with greater success than we might currently enjoy. Such an account might also, if complete, include not only the typical objects and grounds for an emotion, but also, like Aristotle’s account of emotions in *The Art of Rhetoric*, give some account of the typical (and the warranted) subjects of an emotion: who feels it, as well as why and towards whom; who is justified in feeling it, and when.

A richer notion of the cognitive content of an emotion might also allow us to apply insights from discourse ethics (see e.g. Apel 2001, Habermas 1990): if emotions are understood, to a greater extent, communicatively, such tools as we have for normative assessment of communications could more easily be applied to them. The rich descriptive literature on emotion-work (too much to list in full here) since authors such as Goffman<sup>13</sup> and Hochschild, provides a starting-point to inform such an account – although developing this goes well beyond the remit of the present paper.\*

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<sup>13</sup> While Goffman does not discuss the issue of emotion-work directly in the terms used by Hochschild, his discussion of self-presentation and his related distinction between deep emotion and surface emotion introduce concepts that have been used by a number of later authors to enrich discussion of emotion-work.

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