

# Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotion

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## Overheads Class 1: The Philosophy of Emotion 1:

### \* **Introduction:**

- \* Philosophy has dealt with emotion since time of Socrates
- \* Philosophy often contrasted reason with emotion (slave metaphor)
  - Emotion seen as inferior
  - Emotion seen as different/distinct

Over the next few classes I will:

- (1) Trace the history of philosophical treatments of emotion;
- (2) Review 5 types of philosophical emotion theories;
- (3) Outline a number of ongoing debates in this area.

### \* Caveats:

- Different philosophers focus on different aspects
- The words "emotion" and "passion" don't translate exactly
- Some philosophers focus on specific emotions/ others expound full-blown theories

### **(1) History of the Philosophy of Emotions:**

- \* Plato: - Tripartite division of soul in Republic (emotion involved in spirit & appetite)
- Eros in Symposium (appears involved in reason)

\* Aristotle:

- Affects judgement/ associated with pleasure + pain
- Focus on anger in response to slights
- Analysis has cognitive, social, behavioral and physiological components
- Relates to broader ethical analysis (moderation/ when anger appropriate)

- \* Stoics:
- Cognitive theory of emotions (conceptual errors lead to misery)
  - Strove for ideal of "apatheia" (psychic indifference) to world out of control: avoid emotional attachments

\* Medieval Period:

- Continued focus on ethics (but from Christian standpoint)
- Emphasis on both physiological "humors" + cognitive studies (e.g. of desires and sins)
- Highest virtues (e.g. love) elevated beyond emotion to reason

\* Descartes:

- Dismissed earlier works
- Focused on reason/not impressed with irrational
- Mind = a separate substance from body
- Problem: how do emotions work when separate?
- Interact at base of brain
- Emotions involve sensations, perceptions, desires and beliefs
- Emotion useful when encourages/butresses rational thought: dangerous when distracts/leads astray

\* Spinoza:

- Cognitive approach
- Like Stoics, saw emotions as misguided judgements leading to misery
- Must get thinking straight: not in control of life/ all part of God
- Passive emotions come from unwarranted expectations
- Active emotions emanate from true natures/heighten sense of activity and awareness

- \* Hume:
- Skeptical attack on reason/ fresh look at emotion
  - Emotions motivate ethical behavior / reason should be slave of passions
  - Physical sensation/impression approach combined with cognition
  - Sympathy mitigates self-interest/foundation of society/morality

\* Kant:

- Defends reason against Hume
- Objects to grounding morality on "inclinations"
- Emotion inessential at best/ disruptive at worst
- However, praised shared feeling in aesthetics

\* Nietzsche:

- Culmination of "romantics"
- Celebrated the darker, more instinctual and less rational motives of the human mind
- Disdained the Christian "slave morality"
- Frightened many people/ anticipated 20th century chaos

20th Century:

(1) North America/ UK:

- William James (sensation of physiological disturbance / perception)
- Growth of psychology cut short philosophical work
- Emotions downplayed/ emphasis on logic and science
- Domination of logical positivism (emotions meaningless)

(2) Europe:

- Brentano: Emotions foundation of ethics
- Phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, etc.) Emotions have central place in existence
- Existentialism (Sartre)

Today:

- Rich variety of arguments about emotion
- Current focus on conceptual structures of emotion
- Others object and want to elevate sensory, social and physiological aspects
- More interdisciplinary work

### **Current Debates:**

\* What is an emotion? Do we think of emotion as:

- Intrusive, dangerous, dispensable, or an excuse for irresponsibility?
- Essential to rationality, constitutive of meaning, and/or a mode of responsibility?

- \* What aspects of emotion are essential to analysis? Possibilities:
  - Physiology
  - Sensation
  - Behavior
  - Cognition
  - Social context
  
- \* Can emotions exist without feelings?
  
- \* How are feelings structured? Are physiological sensations insufficient on their own?
  
- \* Should behavioral tendencies/expression be taken as essential?
  
- \* Cognitions: the “formal object” judged, perceived, evaluated, etc. How conscious vs. spontaneous are they?
  
- \* Intentionality: can emotions be “about” non-existent things?
  
- \* Causation has been explained on several inconsistent levels (and attempts to have been made to avoid this through dominant emphases, or reducing all explanations to one)
  
- \* The “rationality” of emotions
  
- \* Emotions and ethics (e.g. similarities/differences by culture/developing physiology)
  
- \* Emotions, choice and free will: we do them vs. they happen to us
  
- \* In the end, understanding self and examining life requires some understanding of emotion

