

## **EMOTION, KNOWLEDGE AND THE EXTERNALIST MODEL**

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Emotion forms a very important part of human mind. Emotion is said to give meaning to human existence. People find their lives worth living or even worth dying for the sake of emotions that they entertain. It is said to motivate people into action. Emotion is most intimately associated with the person who has the emotion and it also leaves the room open for self-deception. Philosophers often find it difficult to have a neat theory of emotion for the vagaries of emotive responses that people make and the blurred character of the boundaries of different types of emotions. Nevertheless, a complete account of the mental demands a serious treatment of emotion. Emotion often acts as a bridge between the cognitive and the agentive self. In this way, emotion forms the continuity in the ownership of cognitive evaluative and the agentive aspects. In the present paper I shall mainly focus on what might be called ‘epistemology of emotion’. I shall start with a brief presentation of how

emotion could be understood. And this leads to a discourse on the role of emotion in human epistemic life. Does emotion form an integral part of man's cognitive repertoire? Can emotive experience be understood in terms of the normal epistemic model like that of perception? If emotive experience could be explained in terms of perceptual knowledge, then emotion could very well be treated as another form of knowledge, which in its turn, would have serious repercussion on the 'inner-outer' distinction, a distinction that philosophy of mind makes a great deal out of. Moreover, the realism-anti-realism debate in theory of knowledge looms large over the background once emotion is accounted for in terms of the generally accepted perceptual knowledge, a model that I call 'externalist model'.

Some philosophers hold that emotions are special feelings brought into existence by changes in physiological conditions relating to the autonomic and motor functions. When we see that we are in danger, for example, this perception brings in a whole set of bodily responses, and our awareness of these responses is what constitutes fear. William James thus maintains that "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and [it is] not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be"<sup>1</sup>. This theory has been severely criticized for being not sensitive to the nuanced differences that exists between different kinds of emotions and also due to the fact that emotions can very well claim to have rational scaffolding in the sense that emotions do have a rational backup. Attempts however have been made to construct a revised theory of emotion as feeling where feelings in general are said to have intentional objects and emotion as a feeling also has its intentional object. This needs to be understood with a bit of caution, to which I shall come back soon.

A minimalist definition of emotion could be given as proposing that an emotion has 1. an appraisal, 2. an inclination to action and 3. a capacity to be felt as its elements<sup>2</sup>. Pleasure, for example, is born out of evaluating something to be likeable, a proneness to continue a relationship with the object and the presence of the feeling of agreeable or gratifying. This definition clearly takes into account all the

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<sup>1</sup> William James, "What is an Emotion?" *Mind*, 9, pp. 188–205.

<sup>2</sup>Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, p. 269

three aspects of emotion, viz. evaluative, action oriented and feeling. Since early times, emotions have been classified into four kinds: pleasure, pain, desire and dread. This is true of early Indians and Stoics as well. The affective nature of each of these emotions is different: Pleasure has favouring as its accompaniment, pain has hurting, desire has yearning and dread has its burning. Pleasure and pain arise out of a sense-object contact or even from memory or things anticipated. Desire and dread can follow from pleasure or pain; they can arise out of memory also.

According to some philosophers, emotions do not have an intentional object and so they are not knowledge (belief, judgement). Emotion does involve an appraisal and appraisal is directed to an object, but this object is not the intentional object of the emotion. The emotion is not 'about' the object. The emotion might have a cause or it might be directed at something or some person, but the cause or the target is not the intentional object of the emotion. The changes that are born out of emotion take place in the subject and not necessarily in the target of the emotion. It is sometimes difficult even to identify the cause of emotion. A general state of depression or euphoria might not have any specific cause or a set of causes, whereas a state of annoyance could have a specific cause. In the case of annoyance, the cause need not be the object of the emotional state. A might be annoyed by B's drunkenness, may be because of some indecent remark that B made while he is drunk. Is A's annoyance directed at B's drunkenness? Even if A's annoyance is caused by B's indecent remark made while he was drunk, simply because B made this remark in his state of drunkenness and so does not really believe in it, the cause is quite a spurious one.

One could decipher a distinct sense of the term 'object' in this context. When knowledge is said to have an object in the sense of a proposition or a judgement, then 'object' means content and according to the theory mentioned above, emotions do not have a content (*arthapravāṇa*) in this sense. But since emotions are directed to something in its different modalities, emotions do have target (*aprāpta*). Of course one could feel an emotion and also one could notice it. One could feel the emotion when one is directed toward the target of the emotion and when one is directed to oneself one notices that one is under the grip of the emotion. One notices that one is scared only when one feels scared and so self-knowledge, in the case of emotion, is a

matter of how the world presents itself to the person. As mentioned earlier, since every emotion is a goal-seeking activity, emotions evolve round the seeker, the sought and the path to be followed to attain the goal sought after.

From the above mentioned minimalist definition of emotion it is clear that in every emotion there is a core affective state, there is a range of arousal conditions and also there is a set of symptomatic effects including behavioural and physiological manifestations. Praśastapāda defines the emotion of pleasure as a condition of favourableness (*anugraha*)<sup>3</sup>. Pleasure is associated with embracing (*abhiṣvanga*). If pleasure is the result of attending to the thing liked (*iṣṭa-upalabdhi*), then what causes the pleasure is the thing reached out (*abhipreta*), and not the inner state itself. This explains why pleasure is not generated in a person if she does not attend to the thing that is pleasant in spite of the thing being present before her. There is a sense of favourableness in pleasure and also there is a sense of favourableness in one's knowledge of pleasure. 'Embracing' signifies that the flow of pleasure be uninterrupted and it be repeated again and again. Pleasures of different kinds have been talked about in Vaiśeṣika philosophy like sensual pleasure (*vaiśayika*), pleasures of mind (*manorathika*), pleasures arising out of repeated practice or training (*abhyāsika*), those associated with self-respect like special achievement (*abhimānika*). There is also pleasure of the wise person, who does not have any desire, anticipation etc. and this pleasure arises out of her wisdom, peace of mind and contentment.

That pleasures are non-cognitive mental states, that they are neither perception nor judgement, is implicit in Praśastapāda. This actually comes out in a big way later on in the debate between the Buddhists and the Nyāya philosophers. If the core issue in the debate between realism and its opponent is whether one can accept the independent existence of the object, independent of the corresponding experience of it making room for a genuine distinction between the object and its experience, then such a view does not seem to pose any problem with regard to our experience with the ordinary external objects. My knowledge of the table and the

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<sup>3</sup> *Praśastapādabhāṣya*, Part II, Trans. By Damodar Asram, Adyapith Blakasram, Kolkata, 2000, p. 431

table that lies out there in the world seems to be distinct. Many other people can be aware of the same table. But my knowledge of the table is exclusively mine. Most of us seem to be comfortable with this. But things get really murky when we turn our attention from external objects to our inner realm, the so-called internal mental states like pleasure etc. If pleasure is explained a la external object, then there seems to be a distinction between pleasure and our knowledge of it. If at all there is such a distinction, then could it be that I have pleasure but I don't have knowledge of it? Could I have unfelt pleasure? The problem with these inner episodes is that unlike external objects, these inner episodes could not exist if the owner of these episodes did not exist. Also these inner episodes cannot be directly perceived by any other person except the owner herself. Even if pleasure and awareness of pleasure are inseparable, does it imply that pleasure is of the nature of awareness itself? If you are a realist and prefer the model of external knowledge, then you will argue for the independence of pleasure from the knowledge of it. In other words, a realist would keep pleasure out of the realm of knowledge. And if you are an idealist, if you are keen to fuse the object with the knowledge of it, then you will argue for treating pleasure as a form of knowledge, a kind of cognitive episode of inner perceptual awareness kind. If awareness of pleasure becomes identical with pleasure, then pleasure turns out to be of the nature of knowledge. But if, realist insists, the external model of knowledge is applied to the case of knowledge of pleasure, then the object and its knowledge should be kept apart and so, the realist concludes, pleasure cannot be of the nature of knowledge. A thorough going idealist would end up in questioning the 'inner 'outer' distinction, The so called privacy of the inner world and the public nature of the outer world does not cut much ice with the idealists, for they would question any attempt to erect a boundary between the outer sensations and the inner feelings of pleasure etc. The realist, on the other hand, is in favor of making a distinction between the inner and the outer and getting swayed by the externalist model denies pleasure etc. of the stature of knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> B.K.Matilal, *Perception*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 295

Historically this debate starts following an examination of the definition of perception<sup>5</sup>. If ‘arising out of sense-object contact’ is all that is there in the definition of perception, then pleasure too would be considered a kind of perceptual knowledge, for pleasure also arises out of sense-object contact. Then elements that produce pleasure would also be regarded as *pratyakṣa pramāṇa*. To block this possibility, to assert that only those elements that produce *pratyakṣa* would be considered *pratyakṣa pramāṇa*, the word ‘*jñāna*’ has been inserted in the definition. In other words, pleasure and the elements that produce pleasure cannot be treated as perceptual knowledge.

The cognitivists assert that pleasure, pain, desire, dread and will are all forms of cognitions. They allude to a principle of similarity: the effects can be dissimilar only if their causes are dissimilar. But if effects have similar causes, effects have to be treated as similar. Or else the principle will be violated and the attempt to distinguish the effects from one another would be an ad hoc one, lacking any reason. X and non-X can be produced from causes that are of different nature. Pleasure and its knowledge are produced from the same cause and so they cannot be different.

The realist rebuts by arguing that in our perceptual experience we find that the causes of knowledge (of pleasure) and pleasure are not identical. The feeling of pleasure is felt as of the nature of being pleasant in one’s inner realisation. Knowledge (perceptual), on the other hand, is realised as knowledge of object. We all accept this difference. Thus pleasure and its knowledge can never be identical. The nature of the knowledge of pleasure evolves into different forms of pleasant and painful experiences. This is what we find in our experiences. One could, of course, define this knowledge of pleasure the way one likes. We all experience knowledge as of the nature of revolving round its object and we do not experience pleasure to be of such nature, i.e. to be revolving round an object. Knowledge always comes to us as revolving round object. Knowledge is never bereft of object. Pleasure and pain are never felt to be revolving round object.

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<sup>5</sup> Jayanta Bhatta, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. & transl. by Pancanan Tarkavagisa, Calcutta University, Kolkata, 1941, pp. 40-55

It must be accepted, however, that we do experience the difference between the knowledge of pleasure and knowledge of pain and this difference is due to the nature of knowledge being different in two cases. But it is to be noted that this difference in the nature of the two cases of knowledge is due to the difference in their objects, one having pleasure and the other having pain as its object. Knowledge itself is neither of the nature of pleasure or pain. To illustrate this with the help of an example, the difference in the form of doubt (*samśaya*) and false knowledge (*viparyaya*) are due to the difference in the nature of these two. As knowledge both are similar. But they have different objects and so they are of different nature and hence they have different forms. The object of doubt involves uncertainty (swinging between two possibilities). The object of false knowledge is negated. But pleasure and pain do not come to us as having their objects. Pleasure etc. are different from knowledge; they are internal properties. Knowledge of pot has got its object and so pleasure and pain are different from it. Similarly all knowledge has got its object and so pleasure etc., are different from knowledge.

It cannot be argued that pleasure is self-revealing and so it is of the nature of knowledge. It cannot be proposed that pleasure is not only apprehended, it is also the apprehender. The realists, of course, do not accept the self-revealing nature of knowledge. So this analogy is not acceptable to them. Nobody experiences pleasure as apprehender (*grāhaka*). But if pleasure etc., are not self-revealing, then how could one account for the production or nonproduction of pleasure? Surely presence of pleasure and its absence must make some difference. Or else a person could be in a pleasant state for ever or she could be in a non-pleasant state forever. This cannot be accepted. Whenever pleasure is produced, it is felt. There has to be a difference between pleasure that is produced and pleasure that is not produced. Moreover, if pleasure is self-revealing like light, light being accessible to all, pleasure should also be accessible to all and then a person where pleasure is not produced would also have pleasure. Surely this is absurd.

If the cognitivists are keen to treat pleasure etc as of the nature of knowledge, then they have to accept either one of the following alternatives: 1. One particular piece of knowledge is of the nature of pleasure, pain etc. or 2. Some knowledge is of

the nature of pleasure and some other knowledge is of the nature of pain etc. If one accepts the first alternative, then, since one and the same knowledge is of the nature of both pleasure and pain, opposite experiences like pleasure and pain will be felt at the same time in one person. If one accepts the second alternative, then, some knowledge being of the nature of pleasure and some other knowledge being of the nature of pain, there has to be another knowledge that is unrelated to pleasure or pain but has as its object a knowledge that is of the nature of pleasure or pain. Notice, this second level knowledge has got its object. And so the nature of this meta-level knowledge and the nature of pleasure are different. As in the indirect knowledge of an object, in the absence of the object, the object can still be predicated to knowledge, similarly even in the absence of pleasure, pleasure could be predicated to knowledge as an object. This again reinforces the conclusion that pleasure and its knowledge are different.

The cognitivists argue that since the same set of causal factors are in play in the production of pleasure as well as the knowledge of pleasure, there is no harm in treating pleasure as of the nature of knowledge. Same set of causal conditions cannot produce effects that are of different kinds. The caveat in this stance is that the causal conditions are not homogeneous. There are varieties of causes. There are certain causes that are common to different kinds of effects. Water and sufficient sun light are the common causal conditions for the production of varieties of rice. But for the production of specific kinds of rice like *āman* etc. specific kinds of seeds are required. These special varieties of seed are the *nimitta kāraṇa* of the relevant kind of rice. So we have to accept two sets of causal conditions viz. general causal conditions and specific causal conditions. It cannot be denied that the *samavāyi kāraṇa* and the *asamavāyi kāraṇa* of both pleasure and knowledge of pleasure are identical, *samavāyi kāraṇa* being the self and the *asamavāyi kāraṇa* being the self-mind contact. These causal conditions are general causal conditions. But we need to tell the specific causal conditions responsible for the production of pleasure and also the knowledge of pleasure. And here the specific causal conditions diverge; knowledge hood being the specific cause of knowledge and pleasantness being the specific cause of pleasure. Of course, the general causal conditions and specific causal conditions are not unrelated. They have a relation called *yogyatā* meaning that both the two sets of causal



conditions are conducive to the production of a single effect (*ekakāryānukūlatva*). Needless to say, in the absence of this relation the set of general causal conditions and the set of specific causal conditions will fail to produce any effect.

Moreover not all knowledge arises out of previous knowledge (this is a thesis the realists have defended elsewhere). But all pleasure arises out of knowledge. Pleasure, pain etc. arise out of knowledge of objects that are either sometimes welcome (*upādeya*) or to be gotten rid of (*heya*).

One last attempt could be made on behalf of the idealists to show the similarity between pleasure and the knowledge of pleasure. Remember, the whole debate started with a defense of the insertion of the word *jñāna* in the definition of perception. One could argue that the word *jñāna* is redundant, for only knowledge can be either legitimate (*avyabhicārī*) or illicit (*vyabhicārī*) and the word ‘legitimate’ has already been there in the definition. But the counter to this point is that pleasure also could be illicit, as in being in touch with or having a relation with another lady. The pleasure arising out of this relation is illicit pleasure. But in what sense is this pleasure illicit? We can compare this with illicit knowledge. In illicit knowledge the real object appears as something else. Similarly, it could be argued that presence of pleasure in a situation where there is no pleasure is an example of illicit pleasure. In illicit pleasure, presence of pleasure is only imagined. But isn't there any pleasure in embracing another lady? As knowledge of silver in the presence of conch shell is a false knowledge, so is this pleasure a false pleasure. But how can this pleasure be false, for this is of the nature of happiness? But then how can the knowledge of silver in case of conch shell be a false knowledge for here also knowledge has got its object. It is true that though this is of the nature of knowledge, this is illicit in so far as its object is concerned. Similarly though the pleasure in the above mentioned case is of the nature of happiness, this pleasure is illicit in so far as the method (*sādhana*) is concerned. The false knowledge though produced in and through the cognitive mechanism, is false because it is negated by perception. Similarly the illicit pleasure is produced following the mechanism of pleasure, but it is negated (forbidden) by the moral injunctions (*śāstra*). As perception blocks the false knowledge, the moral injunction blocks the quasi pleasure arising out of the relation with another lady. This

is illicit pleasure for here the pleasure is produced out of something that is not the real cause of pleasure. So the statement that only knowledge is capable of being either legitimate or illicit falls flat. This only strengthens the suggestion that the word *jñāna* is necessary to be included in the definition of perception and the presence of this word implies that knowledge is different from pleasure etc.