

Review of Gustaffson et al (eds) *Emotions & Understanding: Wittgensteinian Perspectives*, Palgrave, 2008. Hardback 240pp. ISBN:13: 978-0-230-20144-6

Reviewed by Michael Campbell, PhD candidate in Philosophy, King's College London.

Much recent interest, both in philosophy and in the nebulous discipline of cognitive science, has focused on understanding emotions. This volume, bringing together contributions from both established thinkers and young researchers, is a timely addition to the literature, establishing as it does the relevance of Wittgenstein's work – and a Wittgensteinian approach more generally – to our attempts to account for the emotional aspects of our mental lives.

The thirteen papers exhibit astonishing diversity in ostensible subject matter (ranging from abstract philosophy of mind to aesthetics via ethics and thence to psychology), but at the same time a commendable degree of unity of approach, evidence of a strong *esprit de corps* between the contributors. The opening two papers direct themselves towards offering explication and interpretation of Wittgenstein's views. Alice Cary's piece, entitled 'Wittgenstein's Commonsense Realism about the Mind' draws together material from the *Philosophical Investigations* together with passing references to recent major interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy in order to argue that he held a 'commonsense realism' philosophy of mind. Joachim Schulte's paper ('Wittgenstein on emotion') sets out to argue that Wittgenstein's writing on emotions can be divided into an earlier and later period (corresponding to 1946-1948 and 1948-1949); the earlier period characterised by attempts to give a unitary account of emotions, the later period by his dissatisfaction with such attempts and his introduction of the notion of a "carpet [or tapestry] of life" to describe the complex ways in which our emotional responses are embedded within the context of a (human) life.

Three papers argue specifically against reductionist tendencies in neuroscience, psychology and philosophy, respectively; these are chapters by Peter Hacker, Phil Hutchinson and Michael McEachrane. McEachrane's paper, on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, can helpfully be grouped with Rupert Read's chapter ('Extreme Aversive Emotions') as the two that will be of most direct relevance to psychologists: both suggest that philosophy can have practical consequences in how we understand and treat mental disorders; for McEachrane in transforming how we understand role of belief and negative thoughts in the outlook of people with depression, for Read in giving a novel characterisation of "the extreme aversive emotion of psychotic and quasi-psychotic psychopathology that I will call 'dread'" (221)

John Canfield, Lars Hertzberg and David Cockburn's pieces take as their starting point hostility towards philosophical theorising on the self and the emotions, insofar as such theories have a tendency to simplify the phenomena through looking for a unitary account where in actual fact there exists a multiplicity of fine grained distinctions. However, rather than stop at this point, all three make positive recommendations concerning what we are to look for in an account of the emotions, arguing that in order to understand an emotional response we need to pay attention to the context in which that response is located, to its role within (as it were) a form of life. This conclusion connects back to Schroeder's reading of his 'later period' Wittgenstein, and also looks forward to Read's paper which describes the

psychopathology of dread as a form of loss of the world, in his words “a felt Weltverlust” (222).

The papers by Ylva Gustafsson, Duncan Richter, and Camilla Kronqvist look at the repercussions that different understandings of the emotions (and the purported failure of various philosophical accounts of the emotions) have for our conception of ethics. Gustafsson’s paper is a polemic against those philosophers who conceive of empathy as “a general and neutral method for understanding others” and as a precondition for compassionate treatment of others. Kronqvist discusses philosophical accounts of love which see it as a necessarily idealising and hence distorting way of viewing others, arguing that this supposition is based on misleading pictures of the nature of love and of what is required for a view of someone to be accurate or inaccurate. Richter’s paper is dedicated to demonstrating that – like the concept of ‘emotion’ in general – the concept ‘happiness’ is “blurry” (185) and discussing the ramifications of this for moral theories that would seek to legislate to human beings on the basis of some precise notion of the nature of human happiness.

Gustafsson’s, Kronqvist’s and Cockburn’s papers are distinctive in that they are interested not only in the means by which we come to an appropriate understanding of the emotions, but also in the issue of when, if at all, emotional responses are themselves forms of understanding, rather than either means to, or barriers to, genuine understanding conceived of as a cognitive achievement. These essays can fruitfully be read alongside Raimond Gaita’s work on the same theme (cf. Gaita, “Truth as a Need of the Soul” in *A Common Humanity*).

Daniele Moyal-Sharrock discusses and attempts to dissolve ‘the paradox of fiction’ (as she puts it: “how can we be moved by what we know does not exist?”). Her central contention is that misleading accounts of the nature of emotions engender this paradox, and that we have independent reasons from the phenomenology of our experiences of art to abandon these accounts, in favour of her “aesthetico-cognitive” approach (178), within which no such paradox arises. Her central contention here is that we mistake the importance of literature in our lives if we think that fiction is always answerable to ‘reality’ – on the contrary “the penetration of a great creative genius is such that life learns from fiction” (174).

If this volume of essays has a weakness, it is in a lingering uncertainty about to whom these papers are addressed. From the reviews on the cover – one by Louis Sass, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Rutgers, and one by Benjamin Tilghman, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Kansas State – it might be inferred that the editors aim to pitch this work at scientists as well as philosophers; and, from the manner in which Wittgenstein’s work is marshalled against ‘mainstream’ philosophical concerns, the intended philosophical audience seems to be a ‘broad church’, not simply those who count ‘Wittgenstein studies’ amongst their areas of specialism. As with any attempt to make difficult work accessible to such a large audience, there are occasional irritations. Scholars of Wittgenstein are likely to find some of the interpretive assumptions made in the papers jarring. For example, Cray says of Wittgenstein that “he observes that, if we are to preserve the intuitively attractive thought that any particular sensation, S, places rational constraints on our beliefs about it... then we are obliged to give up an understanding of sensations as merely given particulars that are accessible to reflection apart from conceptual activity on our part and hence in a manner that makes them discursively unformulable”, quoting in support PI §258. But this is not “to

put the point in some of [Wittgenstein's] own terms" (16); it is a paraphrase, and potentially a very misleading one since, to my knowledge, there are no mentions in the Investigations of either 'rational constraints on beliefs' or, indeed, 'rationality'. More generally, one might wonder about imputing to Wittgenstein adherence to any '-ism', even realism. If, for example, we should be suspicious of the temptation to characterise the mental in terms of states or processes (as Wittgenstein is - PI §308), then we should be equally suspicious of Cray's claim that our psychological descriptions are in the business of supplying illuminating accounts of certain causal relations in our lives. (20)

Moreover, many of the papers in this collection presume that a Wittgensteinian approach involves offering reminders of the criteria which are constitutive of the concept in question (e.g. the concept of 'anger', or 'I', or 'mood' &c.) – cf. for example Hacker's paper, Cockburn p.137, Canfield p.105. It is perhaps a reliance on such criteria that engenders the occasional tendency to make bold philosophical claims which cannot be justified simply by referring to our ordinary uses of language, or to common sense, but which are left in the text otherwise unsupported. Where these serve presumptively to exclude *bona fide* philosophical positions, they are likely to frustrate philosophers not already convinced by the Wittgensteinian approach. Thus, in between drawing many sensible contrasts between different emotional states, PMS Hacker makes the following assertion: "things being thus-and-so may be a reason for feeling a given emotion – and those who come to know or to believe that things are so, and *who care*, will normally feel that emotion. They have a reason for so feeling...The emotions we feel are reasonable (within the framework of the culture and times to which we belong) to the extent that they are directed towards an object that warrants the feeling, and to the extent that the intensity of the emotion felt is proportional to its object." (53) However, that emotions should be both warranted by, and proportional to, their objects, and that the appropriateness of emotions is a matter of their reasonableness are both contentious positions, and should not simply be taken for granted.

It may be the constructive atmosphere and broad scope of the essays has somewhat undermined any pressing need of the contributors to fight tooth and claw for every point made. Occasionally, this leads to somewhat careless remarks which threaten the convincingness of the paper as a whole. I offer two examples. Gustafsson claims "[empathy philosophers' have] no perspective on human beings at all but rather on a theoretical construction, the mind". (155) It is not clear what she means by this, since the mind, as a theoretical construction, is only useful *because* it gives us an insight into human beings. She discusses a case (which she takes from Peter Goldie) of a person who stands in a queue predicting how the woman in front of him might react if he queue-barges in front of her; and Gustafsson concludes "another person standing calmly in the queue not reflecting at all about the woman in front of him would, *as I see it*, express a much more respectful attitude and thus a more serious form of understanding the situation than Goldie's manipulating person does by his careful reflections" (154; my emphasis). – I simply don't share the intuition here, or see how it licenses referring, in dismissive tone, to the mind as "no perspective on human beings". If I stand in the queue, idly wondering whether the woman in front of me would get angry if I barged in, it hardly seems that in so wondering I pay her disrespect. Furthermore, if I predict that she would get angry (perhaps justifiably so, perhaps not), but still push in, and – lo and behold – tempers flare, then I have, it seems, understood something of this woman (this human being) perfectly well: viz. her temper and its causes.

Similarly, one feels that something has gone wrong when Moyal-Sharrock, in the process of criticising Kendall Walton's theory, that in fiction we do not feel but only play at having emotions, says "I feel more for the death of Desdemona, who I know does not exist, than for the death of my neighbour's sister who does, because I *know* Desdemona far better" (173-4). One wonders what one's neighbour would make of this claim. Perhaps you feel more in the sense of being more inclined to cry at the death of Desdemona – but then, you are present at her death and not (presumably) present at the death of one's neighbour's sister (if you imagine witnessing both moments then the latter seems incomparably worse, infinitely more wrenching). And anyway, this is a fairly shallow conception of "feeling", since in one's witnessing of the death of Desdemona most of the characteristic marks of grieving are absent; after the event if one goes for a drink, it is to an after-show party, not to a wake.

Lastly, although apparently aimed at scientists, it is sometimes unclear just how helpful the essays will be to those whose interest in the emotions is primarily empirical. For example, in his essay Hutchinson criticises "the empiricist's picture of mind and world...The world is unconceptualised, brute given, merely having causal impact upon our minds. Not only are we not obliged to accept this picture of mind and world, but there are others available to us, such as... the neo-Aristotelian picture of mind." (71) Unfortunately, Hutchinson does not go on to explain what a neo-Aristotelian picture of the mind is (except to mention that it is McDowell and latterly Putnam's view) nor to detail the merits of that approach over the 'empiricist' picture, which is anyway so briefly and sweepingly characterised as to lack any real validity. In part as a result of this tendency, psychologists may be left wondering what practical consequences follow on from the philosophical reminders they are offered. For example, when Read proposes that we understand psychotic psychopathologies as 'a radical loss of the world', is he proposing that the language of 'un-' and 're-worlding' be adopted as part of the jargon of a paradigm for the treatment of (e.g.) schizophrenia, or is he merely using poetic language to emphasise the difficulties that will confront anyone who wants to develop (non-pharmacological?) treatments for the illness? Again, McEachrane insists that we need a "more accurate" (97) Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) than the working model, which currently maintains that all psychological disturbances are explicable in terms of the beliefs of the patient and sees treatment therefore as a process of belief adjustment. A better approach, he claims, would focus "on the outlook of the client more generally" (ibid) and therefore make its primary goal "to change how the client, more broadly, sees things" (ibid). A CBT practitioner is likely to wonder what standard of accuracy is being imputed here; or - to put the point another way - why a more philosophically accurate CBT should be preferable to it in its current state.

These criticisms, however, are minor when compared with the value of the collection as a whole, which contains many fresh and valuable insights. Moreover, the intellectual frustrations provoked by some essays do serve as prompts for greater engagement with Wittgenstein's work, and provoke further reflection on how a Wittgensteinian approach can both help us to understand emotions and to characterise in what sense emotional responses can themselves be a route to a form of understanding. Thus these frustrations and the volume as a whole, are warmly to be welcomed.