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The logic of affect

PAUL REDDING

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The past decade has witnessed a sharp increase in philosophical, psychological, and cognitive scientific interest in the emotions. This reawakening is a natural response to the overtly cognitive and computational (i.e. somewhat non-emotional) treatments of mind that usurped behaviorism. But much of the rekindled interest may also be credited to two popular books by neurobiologists. Antonio Damasio's *Descartes' error* and Joseph LeDoux's *The emotional brain* paint vivid pictures,

not merely of neurobiological evidence favoring new accounts of particular emotions, but of a wealth of new data suggesting how emotions, generally, might be produced by the brain.

The popularizing projects of LeDoux and Damasio are ambitious in scope. They not only seek to tell a story about the emotional brain, but set it against a backdrop of traditional thinking about feeling. LeDoux's chapters, for example, begin with epigraphs from historical figures, Leonardo da Vinci to Fyodor Dostoevsky, Emily Dickinson to Davy Crockett. Damasio not only published the audaciously titled *Descartes' error*, he has recently authored a book called *Looking for Spinoza* (2003). The historical claims are important for the popularizations, insofar as the project is not merely explaining how the brain produces emotions, but how that account upends traditional ideas about feelings. What sets Paul Redding's *The logic of affect* apart from these popular works is the seriousness with which it tackles the history of philosophical thinking on the subject. Where Damasio and LeDoux rekindle interest in the theory of feeling, Redding gets its history straight.

Or at least straighter. *The logic of affect's* central project is showing how our current thinking about fears, levities, and rancors is continuous with that of German Idealists. The book is thereby, basically, a work in the history of philosophy. Readers looking for a theory of neural implementation to rival Damasio's or LeDoux's will be sorely disappointed when they stumble into chapters on Fichte and Schelling. But while the historically sensitive may be most appreciative, Redding's is not just a history for the historian. A major indicator is the fact that the Kant of the central chapter is the Kant of Patricia Kitcher rather than that of Henry Allison or Paul Guyer. It is fair to say that *The logic of affect* seeks to do for the post-Kantian Idealists what Kitcher has recently done for Kant: to bring them into the fold of 20th century, broadly functionalist, thinking about the mind. So Redding's work is also a popularization project, albeit of a slightly different sort.

The guiding lights for Redding's cognitive scientific history of German Idealism are two great philosophical psychologists at the dawn of the 20th century: William James and Sigmund Freud. Redding indulges two early chapters on James and Freud, respectively, in part because each provided an unusually sophisticated account of emotions, but also because they

mediate our relation to the older, Idealist tradition. Twenty-first century psychologists and philosophers may not be surprised to discover a number of our basic concepts, much of our theoretical orientation (namely, notions of unconscious emotional responses, of so-called "access consciousness," even the idea that emotions develop as transactions *inter vivos* conferring selective advantage) inherited from James or Freud. It is more surprising to learn that these foundations were taken from, or formulated against, German Idealists.

The account of James divides him between his earlier period and his later radical empiricism. Redding defends the earlier theory, contained in the *Principles of psychology* (1890) and "What is an emotion?" (1884), from misinterpretations in subsequent cognitive science. In this regard, he singles out readings of Cannon in the 1920s, and Schachter and Singer in the 1960s. But he need not have limited himself. One of the difficulties in understanding James' cerebral reflex theory has been that the Jamesian reflexes were meant to occur at different levels of the organism—the physiological level, certainly—but also at the level of our interaction with the environment. For almost a hundred years, James has been treated as if he thought emotions were merely bodily responses, lacking cognitive mediation. Redding (p. 29) defends James by reading, "goal-directed *functions* [as what are] represented neurally." James distinguished the "cerebral reflex" from "lower reflex centers," and Redding traces the sources of that distinction to James' reaction against 19th century neurobiologists John Hughlings Jackson and Theodor Meynert, and through them to the medical tradition largely influenced by the German Idealists and the so-called "Nature Philosophy." So Redding not only traces the Idealist sources of a key Jamesian distinction, he thereby provides an antidote to slanders against James still popular today. Claims like "he [James] gave little or no weight to the process of evaluating mentally the situation that causes the emotion" (Damasio, 1994, p. 130) are, among other things, false.

The work on the German Idealists themselves takes a somewhat different tack. Because the recent cognitive sciences have paid less attention to figures in this tradition (with the exception of Kant), Redding's middle chapters are less a defense and more a general exposition. The star, of course, is the sage of Königsberg. In particular,

Redding's starting point is the notorious *transcendental unity of apperception*. Patricia Kitcher's reading of this delicate Kantian process has simultaneously made Kant more relevant for 21st century cognitive scientists, and Kitcher unpopular with other Kant scholars (a shame, the pairing!). Redding (p. 80) accurately reports on Kitcher's treatment of *apperception* as a "contentually connected system of states," a process that is not an act of the subject so much as the unification of sub-personal representational states which themselves comprise the constitution of a subject. Kitcher's account of *apperception* makes it squarely a metaphysical issue, a basic function of cognition, something that should not be confused for the epistemic issues concerning the subject's awareness of such a function. If this (broadly functionalist) understanding of *apperception* is the appropriate one, then the Idealist tradition itself (which was nothing if not developing reactions to Kant) should be read by its lights.

Fichte's contribution to the critical philosophy (one which did not, as a historical note, please Kant) is read by Redding in a self-consciously Reinholdian way. Redding treats Fichte's attempt to find a starting point for the Kantian system, the doctrine of *intellectual intuition*, the subject aware of itself as subject, as an attempt to clarify a basic concept in Kant's philosophy. Fichte, famously, articulated this basic concept as the I's self-positing. Redding follows the work of Daniel Breazeale in reading the Fichtean notion of *feeling* as a necessary check on self-positing, a check that Fichte needed after abandoning the Kantian notion of a *thing-in-itself*. Fichte's *feeling*, according to Redding (p. 97), is "experiential and sensory, but nonrepresentational," the key element of self-consciousness, the check on *striving*, the goad to reflection, the means by which consciousness is (non-representationally) aware of itself.

Because there is no way around the epistemic element in this account, because the I's self-positing was explicitly advanced as the foundation of all human knowledge, and because it cannot be understood as a merely metaphysical function of cognition, one is tempted to conclude that the extension of a functionalist reading to the post-Kantian Idealists promptly fails. Yet, this is not the conclusion Redding draws; he instead suggests that Fichte's emphasis on the non-representational elements of self-consciousness, the phenomenal features of self-positing, and the qualitative *feeling* associated with the basic

cognitive process, haunts any purely functionalist account. Redding's basic idea is that the recent problems of finding a home for phenomenal consciousness (or qualia) within the functionalist paradigm are much like the problem Fichte faced in Kant, so many years ago.

Whether one appreciates this sort of parallelizing or not, a great virtue of Redding's presentation is the contrast it draws between Fichtean *feelings* and Kantian ones. The notion that feelings are fundamentally close to our selves, closer than other sorts of cognition, has found expression in a variety of powerful ways, from Freud's treatment of the unconscious, to the anthropological theories of "basic emotions," to the continued profitability of Hallmark cards. And this should be seen as sharply opposed to more traditional Kantian (and empiricist) treatments of feeling as affect, as receptivity by the mind to external influence. The dominant account has found expression in equally powerful ways, in the Jamesian reflex theory, in our reduced responsibility for crimes of "passion," in the opposition of emotions that *make us hot to cool reasons that we give*.

The logic of affect's strengths are also its weaknesses. The disadvantage of a book that covers six important historical figures is that none receive the attention each deserves. I often found myself wishing a particular chapter provided greater detail, or a more thorough reconstruction of a theory or problem. The reading of Hegel, for example, appropriates him in the "tradition" of philosophers like Putnam and Burge, Dennett and Clark. This rather whiggish treatment is, of course, the name of the game. But when four such diverse philosophers all become Hegelians, one legitimately wonders what Hegelianism is (Redding's answer is that it is a roughly "externalist" treatment of mental contents or processes—a good answer, but one which requires closer attention than Redding provides). Perhaps the work's central task—showing that the German Idealists, generally, are progenitors of powerful contemporary ideas about mindedness—requires the rather broad approach. Landmarks for Redding's tour are treatments of affect, but there is surprisingly little discussion of the emotions. Whether this is an advantage or disadvantage, the stalking-horse is not emotion so much as the shifting notion of mentality itself. *The logic of affect* accomplishes an astounding feat admirably: it begins to show how a group of thinkers commonly considered anathema to scientific treatments of mind are actually responsible for fundamental portions of it. We will all need more con-

vincing, but Redding takes an important step in the right direction.

"Do we run from the bear because we fear it? Or do we fear the bear because we run from it?" William James wanted to know. He answered— counter-intuitively—the latter. Whether this answer ultimately proves correct or incorrect, there is an important reason that the James–Lange theory has been the theory to beat for the past hundred years. Whether neurobiological investigation into the mechanisms of emotion, increasingly sophisticated, bears out James' answer or buries it, the question remains ahead of its time.

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RYAN HICKERSON
Department of Philosophy, 0119
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive
La Jolla, CA 92093–0119, USA
email: rhickers@ucsd.edu