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Book Review:

Knowing Emotions; Truthfulness and Recognition in Affective Experience

Knowing Emotions; Truthfulness and Recognition in Affective Experience by Rick Anthony Furtak, Oxford University Press, 2018, 248 pages, 9780190492045, \$64.38 (Hardcover), \$39.95 (Paperback).

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Rick Anthony Furtak defends the view that our emotional experiences are unified. Cognitive and sensible, brimming with feeling, thoughts and physical perturbations, an emotion reveals to us what we care about, and shows us the meaning in the world, and our life. Feelings-which he identifies with physical upheavals-are not spice or highlighting; emotions are embodied states of knowing.

Philosophers have claimed that feeling can occur without cognition and that feeling is primarily disruptive. Furtak confronts such opponents. They have taken the claim of neurologist Joseph LeDoux that there is an anatomically “low road” to fear as evidence that we can have emotion without cognition. When Furtak examines the evidence, he finds that this an exaggeration. LeDoux’s writings do not consistently maintain that thesis, and philosophers who wish to say that emotion can occur separated from cognition have cherry picked the research.

It seems that some emotions persist independently of what we know; an emotion might be “recalcitrant.” To mention an example already found in David Hume, a man suspended high in the air in an iron cage may believe the contraption is safe, yet feel fear.

Furtak takes a careful look at the philosophical arguments here and considers psychological research about phobias. When a philosopher describes an example in which she stipulates that a person “knows” something, yet displays an emotion contrary to that knowledge, Furtak suggests the person’s emotional behavior counts against their claim to know. (Hume’s man may very well doubt whether the cage actually is safe.) In the case of phobias, phobics turn out to have mistaken beliefs, to overestimate the probability of certain dangers. So, the case of phobias does not destroy Furtak’s thesis that emotions are unitary states.

Emotions are unitary states, with a strong bodily or physical component, and they allow us to know what we could not otherwise know. Furtak offers us an example from Marcel Proust’s great masterpiece. Marcel achieves a new awareness of his grandmother’s death when, a

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year after her death, he visits a hotel where previously he had stayed with her. While previously he uttered the words conventionally used to indicate her death, his previous state of mind fell short of knowing; only now, with suffering, does he possess real knowledge.

The claims that emotions bring personal knowledge, and are tied up with peculiarities or idiosyncrasies of an individual's history are not new, however Furtak locates the cognitive value of emotions precisely in our uniqueness--our emotional "attunement."

The personal, even idiosyncratic nature of our emotions poses a challenge for any theorist who wants to say that emotions can give us knowledge--because knowledge is, classically, thought to be objective, not subjective. To echo Frege, what I know is not my possession, but can be a common possession shared by others. That which can be known may be the common object of study for a science and its practitioners. Furtak seems to abandon this feature of knowledge, even to the extent that he entertains (while not endorsing) the possibility that what Proust knew about his grandmother might be something that no one else has known or can ever know.

When Marcel is upset, he gains an insight not achievable without the hurt and physical pain. Yet, I wonder: is that feeling alone enough to count as knowledge? Isn't there the further matter of working with that emotional reaction--In conversations, or in writing about the incident, as Proust himself did? And, in that case, hasn't Furtak exaggerated what emotion alone is capable of doing? The upset and feelings which Marcel experienced may be a step on the way to self-discovery, and a crucial one, yet not by itself be identical with the discovery.

In later chapters Furtak uses the emotion of love to elaborate the claim that feelings bring knowledge. Love, or caring, constitute an "emotional a priori," so that love or caring are not merely another emotion, but rather the basis, a presupposition for particular episodes of emotion. He develops this point in a chapter titled "Love's Knowledge." The final chapter grapples with the strong subjectivity which is a feature of Furtak's view. In a brief review I cannot do justice to these chapters or the questions and doubts they raise.

When Beatrice loves Dante, and thereby is able to know him, and even justly appraise him--his faults as well as his virtues--doesn't she also have another capacity--not love, but something else?-- A capacity which allows her to think such a counterfactual as: "If I loved Dante less, I would understand him less?" Isn't such self-reflection distinct from emotion, even if emotion permeates all our psychic states?

Is emotion a source of knowledge? Or, do our emotions primarily teach us how ignorant we have been? Like Proust who knew (or thought he knew) his grandmother, Bathilde, are not

we too startled and disturbed by moments when an emotion reveals that we know less than we had presumed.

A moment of joy reveals a reality we had underestimated. An act of kindness startles us and frees us from our sorrows. But can emotions bring about a Copernican Revolution of self-understanding, rather than a Ptolemaic multiplication of epicycles?

As Furtak recognizes in his final chapter, there is in strong emotion an element of indeterminacy, and no guarantee that emotional suffering leads to knowing happiness; but, then, what makes the difference? Are we to be content with the thought that some people have been gifted with a disposition to work with their emotions and become happier and more self-aware? Whilst others of us just sink more deeply into an emotional morass of endless self-reflection?

Knowing Emotions is a valuable attempt to spell out the claim that emotions contribute to knowledge about ourselves and the world. Curious readers unfamiliar with the literature will find amusement and enlightenment within the pages of this book. More experienced readers will find much to grapple with.

Mark J. Lovas holds a Ph.D. in Ancient Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For twenty years he has alternated between teaching EFL/ESP and Philosophy in Central Europe. He has published in Think, Organon F and the now defunct Journal of Mundane Behavior. His novella, A Neurotic in an Exotic Land, is set in Bratislava, capital of the Slovak Republic.