



**Alix Cohen, Robert Stern.** *Thinking about the Emotions: A Philosophical History.* Mind Association Occasional Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 320 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-876685-8.

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Alix Cohen and Robert Stern's new edited collection, *Thinking about the Emotions: A Philosophical History*, is precisely what its title suggests: a history of philosophical work on the topic of emotions. More specifically, the aim of each contributor—and of the volume as a whole—is to provide something like a snapshot into a moment in the past (primarily the ancient world, the early modern period, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) when philosophers were engaging with the nature and function of emotions. The idea is that these snapshots, both individually and cumulatively, might unsettle our conception of the study of emotions as somehow timeless or, more accurately, of only very recent vintage.

In this, the collection is mostly successful. The volume's excellent introduction, by Daniel Garber, provides a useful historiography of philosophical-theoretical work on emotions and suggests that even though this has become a rather robust and vibrant field since the 1950s or so, it deceives itself by believing that it is somehow the starting point for all theoretical work on emotions and "passions," as Garber calls them. As each of the contributions of this volume reveals, Garber tells us, philosophers were, in fact, theorizing emotions long before the twentieth century. And they were doing so, perhaps more importantly, in ways from which contemporary scholars of emotions,

who tend to approach emotions from their epistemological and disciplinary silos, could learn a thing or two. After all, Garber and the other contributors argue, philosophers from Aristotle to René Descartes to David Hume to Ludwig Wittgenstein approached emotions not as an "autonomous discipline" but rather as something "intertwined with other intellectual domains and larger philosophical projects" (p. 13).

This, it seems, is the primary contribution of this volume, and it is a point worth lingering on, for Garber's explicit (and the editors' implicit) plea is for scholars to approach emotions (and our theories about them) in the same way, to draw on other disciplines—one thinks here of neuroscience, psychology, literature, and music—when doing work on emotions, past and present. To be sure, there is a great deal of this sort of innovative and interdisciplinary work on emotions already underway (here I recommend a visit to Ute Frevert's Center for the History of Emotions in the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, where scholars are fusing historical curiosity with theoretical frameworks drawn from all manner of scientific disciplines), but this plea is nevertheless welcome and compelling.

The individual contributions that follow, while capably written and certainly impressive in their elucidation of individual philosophers' spe-

cific work on emotions (for example, how Aristotle worked to locate virtue in either the rational or irrational part of the soul; or how Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham developed models for how emotions were moderated, eliminated, or otherwise controlled by reason), are unfortunately less useful than Garber's scene-setting introduction, for, other than providing detailed evidence that ancient and early modern philosophers were engaged in serious theoretical work on emotions, they seem to have missed Garber's plea for multidisciplinary. As it happens, these essays engage only in internal debates, clarifying this or that point about specific philosophers but failing to speak to any larger, extra-philosophical point or audience. Any individual essay here might well be utterly fascinating to scholars of that particular philosopher or of that particular theoretical query, but it is difficult to find a great deal of benefit for non-philosophers.

This is perhaps not entirely true, for the work of the philosophers—ancient, early modern, and modern—under study might well provide a helpful framework for those of us approaching emotions from historical, literary, or other vantage points. For an investigation of, say, the emotional history of sex and intimacy, Kevin Mulligan's essay, "Thrills, Orgasms, Sadness, and Hysteria: Austro-German Criticisms of William James," could provide a useful theoretical model for thinking about whether such sensations as sexual pleasure and bodily pain are emotions and can be "motivated" and intentionally controlled, as Max Scheler wondered at the turn of the twentieth century (p. 228). Applied specifically to the study of hysteria (and to the many late nineteenth-century scientists, psychologists, and clinicians who sought to understand it), the potential payoff of this very clear philosophical analysis of James and others is enormous. Similarly, a study of anxiety and nervousness would benefit greatly from a close reading of Sacha Golob's essay, "Methodological Anxiety: Heidegger on Moods and Emotions," which works through Heidegger's theories of emotions

as "moods" and the ways in which anxiety and nervousness seem to function as such (p. 254).

The inward orientation of these contributions is nevertheless somewhat disappointing, for the essays, capable as they are, have the potential to be more than merely useful primers on the emotional theories and quandaries of individual philosophers and their location within the larger philosophical canon. This is admittedly beyond the stated intent of the volume, and it is perhaps unfair to criticize the volume for failing to become something to which it never aspired. However, because the volume casts itself as a sort of history, and because I approached the volume from the standpoint of a historian looking for useful and accessible theoretical work on emotions, a complaint about the frustrating absence of historical context in these essays seems at least somewhat warranted.

Each essay is, indeed, incredibly detailed vis-à-vis the specific philosopher under study, but we get precisely zero reference to the social, cultural, economic, and political—in short, the historical—contexts in which these philosophers were working. These are intellectual histories of a sort, and yet they operate as if the philosophers themselves were utterly insulated from the times in which they lived—as if, in other words, their ideas and theories were and are timelessly motivated and infinitely interesting. And perhaps they are precisely that for historians of philosophy. But this seems problematically akin to studying the history of science and only learning the various scientific theories themselves, not how one theory—for example, of male hysteria or neurasthenia—developed and changed as a result of a whole host of fascinating social, political, and cultural dynamics (as Mark Micale's *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* [2008] does so well).

To be fair, the authors and editors here clearly recognize the ahistoricity of their essays. In her essay on Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and the classification and taxonomy of emotions, Amy Schmit-

ter offers a footnoted defense of this approach, allowing that while “I won’t try to decide how the theoretical concepts I trace might play a role in broad social history, ... I doubt that they are inert” (p. 123). Schmitter even acknowledges that this type of “emotionalogical” approach “may make philosophy seem doubly removed from experience,” which it definitely does. She counters, however, that, in rendering visible and accessible various historical theories of emotions, the essays of this volume provide concrete examples of individual “emotional communities” (here she cites noted historians of emotions Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns) and are historically useful inasmuch as they reveal thinking or philosophizing about emotions in particular times and places. She argues, too, that these emotional taxonomies and theories are “the most readily accessible evidence for the historicity of the emotions,” which, admittedly, is the stated goal of the volume as a whole (p. 124). These points are no doubt compelling, but it also seems like somewhat lazy historical work. After all, is not emotional practice (and the ample evidence thereof) just as interesting as the meta-emotional writings of a small handful of philosophers? Better yet, would not contextualizing the work of these philosophers in the larger emotional communities they inhabited be more interesting still? In the case of Mulligan’s chapter on Austro-German philosophical theories about sexual sensations and hysteria, situating this philosophical work in the context of the medical, psychological, and, indeed, burgeoning sexological work of other Austro-Germans like Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll, Eugen Steinach, and Sigmund Freud (to name but a few) would recreate something of the fin-de-siècle climate of fiery intellectual debate on sex and hysteria. Surely Carl Stumpf, Edmund Husserl, and Max Scheler (the Austro-German philosophers Mulligan brings into conversation with Henry James) were also keenly aware of and influenced by early sexology. Moreover, as all of these men were more than just dispassionate scientists, embedding this intellec-

tual-emotional conversation in the world of the late nineteenth century—“the age of nervousness,” as Joachim Radkau has put it in *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler* [1998]—would not only make for better reading but also tell us significantly more about that oft-misunderstood era.

As a whole, this volume is, therefore, slightly disappointing, but it is nevertheless not without value. Garber’s introduction offers an easy-to-digest breakdown of current theoretical models about emotions (for example, Paul Goldie’s “facts” about emotions, which are fascinating), and the individual essays provide at the very least useful (and in-depth) primers on a whole host of theoretical and philosophical dimensions of emotions. Taken together, they do, without a doubt, offer evidence of the deep history of the study of emotions. This is what the volume sets out to do, and it is successful in this.

Ultimately, though, the essays here do not really address a non-philosophical audience in a way that will likely be very satisfying. Garber’s call to leave our disciplinary silos seems directed everywhere but the field of the history of philosophy, and while this is lamentable, historians and many others will hopefully continue to pursue projects about emotions that draw on a great variety of theories and fields and, more importantly, speak in compelling ways to a broad audience.

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