

# Manchester Lit&Phil

## Philosophy Forum



## The philosophy of emotions and THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: 'intent' (aka Free Will, et al)

Focus paper for the Manchester Lit & Phil Philosophy Forum 23 Feb 2023

Bob Johnson

2022-12-14

EMOTIONS are perhaps the most vital part of any human being. Sadly **EMOTIONS and SCIENCE don't mix**. There is much debate philosophically as to how far reasoning or cognition, can cope with emotions. This is not a trivial question. Currently psychiatry has got hold of the wrong end of the stick – and so desperately needs PHILOSOPHY to help it out.

# 1 Questions

Since, in my view, discussions, are the most electric part of these Forums – here are the **three questions** I suggest for each group:

1st There will never, ever, be a Science of Emotion – YES/NO?

2nd We all possess an indisputable element of Free Will, aka 'intent' – YES/NO?

3rd Under propitious conditions, our 'intent' CAN tame emotions – YES/NO?

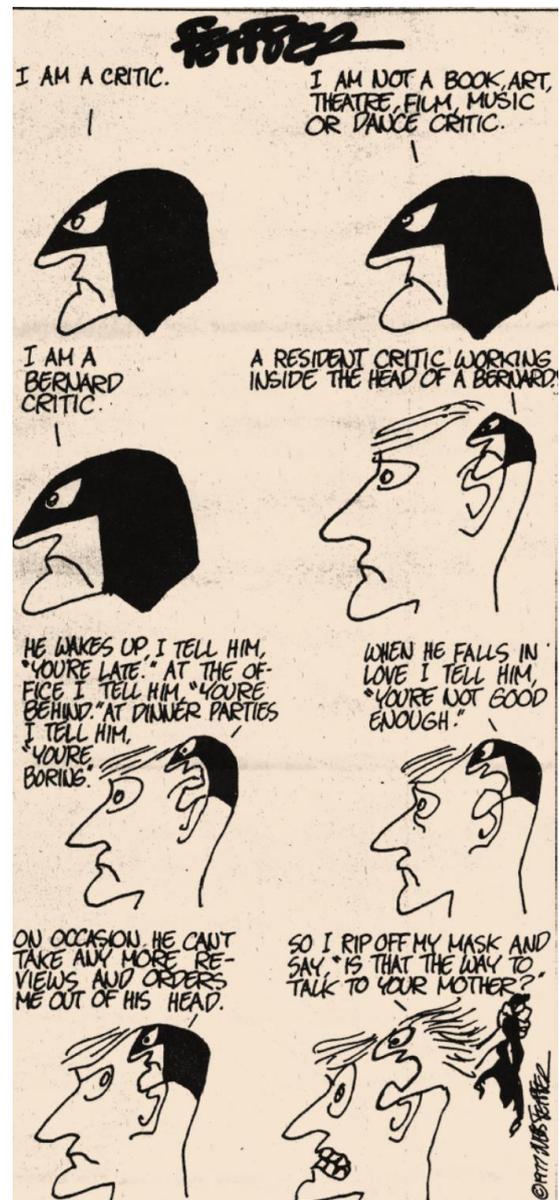
These are considered below.

# 2 Introduction

2.1 EMOTIONS can never be investigated scientifically. This is because Science prioritises OBJECTIVITY, whereas emotions are 100% SUBJECTIVE. The second thing which Science insists on is the 100% exclusion of INTROSPECTION, it's taboo – which is unfortunate since that's where emotions live.

2.2 The trouble is that Science has such a grip on the popular imagination, that discussing emotions in this way struggles to be heard – being countercultural makes progress hard. Here, despite this, a 1977 comic strip shows how devastating emotions can be, even reducing a grown adult to a dithering infant. Yet, though blindingly obvious to the normal observer, it comes as a surprise that Science can offer nothing by way of explanation.

2.3 Clinically, this is "Speechless-Terror" at work – showing how emotions distort coherent, civilised thinking, as they do throughout violence, crime, murder, psychiatry, and war. Videos will be shown in this Forum showing a man struggling as Bernard does, and then succeeding where Bernard does not. Verbatim evidence from a serial-killer demonstrates equal progress. A more optimistic vista is depicted.



- 2.4 It might be argued that science cannot deal with the phenomenal aspect of emotions: the what-it's-like-to-be-ness of affect. This poses the question – can Science investigate other aspects of emotions? E.g.: Psychology based on 3rd party ethological observation of behaviour and the analysis of personal reports? E.g.: Biochemical/biophysical processes (including neurology and endocrinology) plus their correlations with the previous observations and reports? E.g.: models of cognitive imbalance, conflict and impasse which can induce many emotions from rage to despair?
- 2.5 My answer would be that these are all peripheral. As the question cites, these are essentially “3rd party — observations”. And this is the error the Science makes – trying to objectify what is “1st party” in essence— anything else dilutes, and indeed misses the main point. It’s like you moving my arm, which doesn’t compute. E.g. the main thing about anger is that it drives your personal cognition into a corner, and about fear, is that it panics YOUR thought into speech-less terror, or can do. Science can say nothing about this vital aspect. Periphery yes, window-dressing, fine — but if you want action, and I do, then you can’t find that via Science.

### 3 1<sup>st</sup> Question

#### There will never, ever, be a Science of Emotion YES/NO?

- 3.1 If we live in a Clock Work Universe in which everything is Fully Determined by what has gone before, then we are mere robots, fulfilling what we were destined to do. It’s in our stars, or nowadays, our genes. This is the heart of the Great Science Illusion, currently in full sway. However, for millennia people insisted that the sun went round the earth – it doesn’t. Nowadays too many insist we are chemical machines – we’re not. We can think, we can decide. And until we’re allowed to do so by an over-scientific psychiatry – we will be innocent, naïve victims of materialistic determinism. At least that’s my view.
- 3.2 If this is NOT a Clock Work Universe, and not Fully Determined by past causes – then there is a chink in the cosmos to allow for initiatives, effort, and indeed survival. Into this chink, I am happy to insert ‘intent’.
- 3.3 Philosophically speaking, first Hume and then Heisenberg knocked holes in the Clock Work Universe. In 1739. Hume shocked the intelligentsia of the time by suggesting that a given effect could never be guaranteed to follow a given cause, at a later time. Hume went so far as to deride all knowledge as fragmentary – claiming that all the textbooks contained nothing more than “sophistry and illusion”, which

**David Hume (1711-1776)** weakened the concept of causation by maintaining that ‘A causes B’ merely meant ‘A always precedes B’.

**Werner Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle** states that it is impossible to measure or calculate exactly, both the position and the velocity (or momentum) of an object simultaneously. Prediction is therefore uncertain.

while instructive, was a bit over the top. Kant tried mending this breach, but in my view failed.

- 3.4 Heisenberg in the 1920s, “solved” the challenge of the electron by suggesting that the Uncertainty Principle applied to all electrons (see next section). Einstein ducked the issue by asserting, *ex cathedra*, that “God does not play dice with the universe”. Neither succeeded in rescuing Absolute Scientific Knowledge, so it then becomes a question of which of the imperfect views of reality is more successful, or in my view, healthier, than all the others.

## 4 2<sup>nd</sup> Question

We all possess an indisputable element of Free Will, aka ‘intent’ YES/NO?

- 4.1 THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM, when discussing emotions, their control and their interaction with cognition is ‘intent’ – aka Free Will, choice, voting, initiative, *sui generis*, creativity, deciding, et al. A Determinist might cavil at this, but nothing heals without ‘intent’ – new skin grows over your cut finger, which it couldn’t do, if this really was a Clock Work Universe. But this is the central point of this question for discussion. I am an unashamed Non-Determinist, and philosophically speaking, no doctor could be otherwise – though not all see it that way.
- 4.2 It is essential to understand how the Uncertainty Principle applies to electrons – the tighter you define them, the less precision you have. Indeed the more you know about where they are, the less you know about how fast they’re moving away from there – their momentum . The harder you persist in one component, the more you lose in another – it’s tightly proportional. This difficulty in definition applies equally to emotions – the more you think you’ve hemmed them in, the less meaning you are left with.
- 4.3 Emotions can cloud the issue. Either somewhat, or 100%, when Speechless-Terror is in play – but if you acknowledge ‘intent’ – then you have a spanner, that’s to say a verbal device for undoing Speechless-Terror. If you decline to accommodate ‘intent’, then not only does the body keep the score, but extinction looms.
- 4.4 It’s a personal choice – Free Will or automatons – again to be discussed to and fro in the groups. Personally I prefer a smattering of the former. Indeed my namesake, Samuel Johnson typically put his finger on it, in the 1770s, saying – “All Theory is against the Freedom of the Will; all Experience for it”. Both Freudian theory and today’s established psychiatry plump for Theory. My view is that health, especially mental health, is only available by giving enough weight to Experience.

## 5 3<sup>rd</sup> Question

Under propitious conditions, our 'intent' CAN tame emotions  
YES/NO?

- 5.1 Since emotions suffer from an Uncertainty Principle of their own, they cannot be defined verbally – hence they need to be communicated graphically, as above, or by video. Two videos will be shown. The first is of a new-born baby – Ethan – on arrival, he is convulsed with emotions. Miraculously he promptly settles, once he's placed in his mother's arms. To me, this is highly significant. The second video shows Lenny, a lifer, struggling against his emotions, which clearly stop him thinking straight. 8 weeks later, he can then say fluently verbal phrases that his emotions had previously rendered utterly beyond him. This, in my submission, is him exerting cognitive control over his emotions – something he could not do at first, but with appropriate input, he can. Again this is a pragmatic finding, something on which my clinical expertise relied when I ran my clinic – unless you are able to exert your very own 'intent', then your emotions will remain just as out of reach as a Determinist would aver.
- 5.2 With 'intent' – you have the possibility of controlling emotions – without it, they control you – which is your view? Freud believed the second - what about you?



Your notes