

Philosophy 311: Knowledge and Justification

Fall 2013, Northern Illinois University

Geoff Pynn

Handout 12: Jaggar's 'Love and Knowledge'

"I wish to begin [bridging the gap between emotion and knowledge] through the suggestion that emotions may be helpful and even necessary rather than inimical to the construction of knowledge" (146). Three claims:

1. Emotions are intentional states that are socially constructed in several ways.
2. In privileging reason over emotion, traditional epistemology reinforces the subordination of women and other groups stereotypically regarded as emotional.
3. The emotional responses of members of subordinated groups, e.g. women, are of a distinctive epistemic value.

Emotion: Two Views Jaggar Rejects

The "Dumb View": emotions are feelings without cognitive content. Three problems:

1. The same feeling can count as an instance of distinct emotions.
2. Feelings are conscious, but a person may have emotions of which she's unaware.
3. Emotions are largely dispositional, and not just occurrent; a person can be angry / sad / proud without currently experiencing any of the corresponding feelings.

Cognitivist views: emotions are essentially judgments with some "feeling" component. E.g., my anger with a person is essentially a judgment that the person has wronged me in some way, together with some characteristic feeling. Two problems:

1. Suggests that infants / animals are emotionally impaired, at least if they can't form the relevant judgments. Jaggar regards this as a good thing, though: "humans develop and mature in emotions as well as in other dimensions" (149).
2. Still split emotion into two parts: the feeling part and the cognitive part.

Emotion: Jaggar's View:

Emotions are socially constructed. What does this mean?

1. Socio-cultural forces influence which stimuli trigger emotional responses (examples on p. 150 of spicy food, fearing strangers, etc.)
2. Socio-cultural forces shape our understanding of what emotions are (e.g. "hot fluid" theory of anger vs. Illego understanding, 151)
3. Socio-cultural forces shape our concepts / language, and since emotions involve intentionality they affect what emotions exist (ennui, angst, "being a wild pig", "romantic love was invented in the Middle Ages," 151)

Emotions are "active engagements"; "habitual responses"; "ways in which we engage actively and even construct the world".

Emotions presuppose and are presupposed by values: without emotional responses, we would never value one state of affairs over another; "every emotion presupposes an evaluation of some aspect of the environment" --- e.g. fear in an environment with no danger is irrational.

Emotion, dispassionate inquiry, and silencing

Jaggar's bogeyman is something she calls "positivism". For the positivist, emotion distorts observation and impedes knowledge, and the ideal form of inquiry is "dispassionate"

Jaggar acknowledges some ways that emotion can impede the acquisition of knowledge:

Negative emotions inhibit investigation

Being very angry or sad can make you misunderstand your surroundings

People in love are "notoriously oblivious to many aspects of situation around them"

But emotions are "habitual responses" and incorporate our values. So they're inescapable. The ideal of "dispassionate inquiry" is a "myth".

Hmm, but hang on. Here are two different claims:

1. The results of scientific inquiry ought not to reflect any emotional bias.
2. Scientific inquiry is impeded by the emotions of its practitioners.

It does seem like 2 is a myth. But is 1?

Jaggar: emotion is stereotypically associated with women. So the myth of dispassionate inquiry "bolster[s] the epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups ... discredit[s] the observations and claims of many people of color and women. The more forcefully and vehemently the latter groups express their observations and claims, the more emotional they appear and so the more easily they are discredited" (158).

So the proposal seems to be that women are silenced by the combination of:

- A. The ideal of dispassionate inquiry
- B. The stereotype of women as emotional

But suppose that A is not a myth. Given B, there will still be a silencing effect.

Outlaw emotions

Since emotions are socially constructed, they reflect the values and norms of the socially dominant groups, and can "blind us to the possibility of alternative ways of living". But some may experience "outlaw emotions": emotional responses that go against the dominant values.

1. Outlaw emotions can motivate new investigations
2. They "may also enable us to perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions"

When should outlaw emotions be endorsed, and when rejected? A general principle:

"Emotions are appropriate if they are characteristic of a society in which all humans thrive, or if they are conducive to establishing such a society" (161)

The idea implies that the outlaw emotions of the oppressed tend to be appropriate.

Suggestion:

"The perspective on reality available from the standpoint of the oppressed ... is a perspective that offers a less partial and distorted and therefore more reliable view" (162)