

ABSTRACT

MORAL EMOTIONS WITHIN THE HABITUATION OF VIRTUE

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In this dissertation, I examine how moral emotions feature within the habituation of virtues. I suggest that their primary role within the moral life is epistemic: emotions grant agents perceptual access to evaluative properties in the world. I argue that their perceptual function within habit formation is normatively indispensable. I proceed through four methodological movements. I begin by presenting the three historical accounts of emotion I take as most influential on contemporary Western beliefs about emotion and as most dominant within the philosophy of emotion. To that end, I trace Stoic and Kantian accounts of emotion as representative of the strong-cognitivist model and a sentimentalist Humean account as emblematic of the non-cognitivist model. I argue that both accounts fail to capture the complexity of emotions and their role in morality. I then turn to an Aristotelian-Thomistic account of emotion as a limited-cognitivist model which, when updated, supplies an auspicious model upon which emotions can be evaluated.

After this historical survey, I sample empirical literature within cognitive science to support my claim that emotions are a central feature of morality and amenable to rational assessment. Subsequently, I turn to contemporary philosophical models of emotion, which are extensions of the historical accounts I traced in the first chapter. I analyze the judgmentalist account of emotion, represented by Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum, and non-cognitivist appraisal accounts of emotion found in Jesse Prinz, Justin D'Arms, and Daniel Jacobson. After rejecting these models as insufficient, I advance Robert C. Roberts's perceptual account of emotion as concern-based construal, and I defend the perceptual account's analogical salience.

Next, I consider the justification of emotions and suggest that a virtue-epistemological framework ensures that emotions are reliable in the epistemic information they supply. Finally, I consider habituation, by turning to psychological literature and returning to Aristotle and Aquinas, and I explore the connection between habituation and trait formation, and how emotional perception figures therein through thick vignettes of anger, compassion, guilt, hope, and religious awe.