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Emotions from the Perspective of Analytic Aesthetics

Analytic philosophy is not what it used to be – and thank goodness. Its practice in the late Twentieth and early Twenty-first centuries is not grounded in a grand metaphysical design or a particular philosophy of language. If there is a core or central character or ›methodology‹ in analytic aesthetics, philosophy of art, and the perspectives they take on emotions, it is better revealed in current practices rather than in analytic philosophy's origins. One salient feature of the practice of analytic aesthetics – a feature it shares, not coincidentally, with much philosophy of mind, especially in the subfield of philosophical psychology – is the respectful role that is afforded to what psychology and related fields of scientific inquiry have to tell us about emotions. And though introspection has long been known to be inadequate as a psychological method, the highly counterintuitive results of numerous psychological studies of emotions undermine the viability of conceptual analysis or ordinary language *alone* as a philosophical methodology to explain the character of emotions, including those expressed in art and experienced by appreciators of the arts.

One feature of analytic philosophy that has not changed is its focus on issues or questions rather than, for example, histories and genealogies. The logical implications of certain definitions of emotion are central to several sets of issues that have arisen within analytic aesthetics in the last decades of the twentieth

century and continue to engage philosophers in the early years of the twenty-first. Section 2 introduces the debates over how to define emotions in light of a well-known puzzle in the philosophy of art, the paradox of fiction, which are fueled in part by conflicts within the field of psychology with respect to whether particular types of beliefs or other cognitive states, such as thoughts or imaginings, are necessary conditions for emotions. Section 3 examines whether emotions are, or can be, rational. Emotions may be generated by various thoughts or imaginings rather than beliefs. A belief in the truth of what one reads in a work of fiction may be unwarranted and for this reason irrational, but it does not follow that thoughts or imaginings will likewise be irrational. Imagination has always been problematic in relation to reason and art's potential value, and here again, psychological research has something to tell us about the matter, this time by exposing emotions' purported role in the evolution of the species and in the learning history of individual persons. Imaginings are thus not judged on evidential grounds, such as are beliefs, but in relation to their historical origins, such as in the appeal to evolution, or to their role in the development of more wide-ranging mental capacities, such as in the appeal to the learning histories of individuals. Empathizing and sympathizing with fictional characters are more specific applications of the resources of imagination, and they too have received more systematic attention in relation to how humans engage with fiction. I concentrate on empathizing with fictional characters in Section 4, and how it is similar to and different from empathizing with persons in real life. There are two plausible, commonly (but not universally) accepted necessary conditions for empathy. One is that the empathizer must end up in the same or highly similar emotional state as the one with whom one empathizes (whom I shall refer to as the target). To empathize with someone who is angry, for example, one must experience something akin to anger rather than, say, delight. Call this the similarity condition. It is plausibly and typically supplemented by another allegedly necessary condition, a (roughly) causal condition that one must come to be in that state in the same or a sufficiently similar way. On one account, one empathizes in the first instance with a hypothetical reader of fact, who may, in turn, empathize with a character in the work. Though this activity clearly calls for imagination, it also leaves out what is distinctive of literary appreciation, such as a responsiveness to the formal qualities of a work or the way a story or plot is constructed.

In Section 5, I discuss connections between emotions and specific genres of art. Since Aristotle, we have worked with the idea that particular types or genres of art are supposed to evoke particular types of emotions, an idea that has returned to the fore since the concept of a general, generic ›aesthetic emotion‹ has become more discredited. Analytic philosophy of art contains the more specialized philosophies of the visual arts, of literature, of music, of film, and more, which themselves admit of subdivisions that emerge out of the practices of artists and of those who theorize about the arts. According to Aristotle, a good tra-

gedy must evoke pity and fear in the audience. Comedies should amuse their audiences, and some popular or mass art genres, such as horror should produce an experience of what has been dubbed »art horror«. Though Aristotle argued for the beneficial effects of pity and fear, and perhaps also sympathy, in response to tragedy, it is not clear that all emotional responses to art are morally benign, especially where humor is concerned. Not only does one wish for an explanation of how one could feel pleasure along with the otherwise painful and disturbing emotions that are often specific to a genre, but one also needs to consider how it is possible for a *moral* person to feel such pleasures.

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