

# The Passions

*A Study of  
Human Nature*

P.M.S. Hacker

WILEY Blackwell



*A survey of astonishing breadth and penetration. No cognitive neuroscientist should ever conduct an experiment in the domain of the emotions without reading this book, twice.*

**Parashkev Nachev, Institute of Neurology, UCL**

*There is not a slack moment in the whole of this impressive work. With his remarkable facility for making fine distinctions, and his commitment to lucidity, Peter Hacker has subtly characterised those emotions such as pride, shame, envy, jealousy, love or sympathy which make up our all too human nature. This is an important book for philosophers but since most of its illustrative material comes from an astonishing range of British and European literature, it is required reading also for literary scholars, or indeed for anyone with an interest in understanding who and what we are.*

**David Ellis, University of Kent**

Human beings are all subject to boundless flights of joy and delight, to flashes of anger and fear, to pangs of sadness and grief. We express our emotions in what we do, how we act, and what we say, and we can share our emotions with others and respond sympathetically to their feelings. Emotions are an intrinsic part of the human condition, and any study of human nature must investigate them. In this third volume of a major study in philosophical anthropology which has spanned nearly a decade, one of the most preeminent living philosophers examines and reflects upon the nature of the emotions, advancing the view that novelists, playwrights, and poets – rather than psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists – elaborate the most refined descriptions of their role in human life.

In the book's early chapters, the author analyses the emotions by situating them in relation to other human passions such as affections, appetites, attitudes, and agitations. While presenting a detailed connective analysis of the emotions, Hacker challenges traditional ideas about them and criticizes misconceptions held by philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive neuroscientists. With the help of abundant examples and illustrative quotations from the Western literary canon, later sections investigate, describe, and disentangle the individual emotions – pride, arrogance, and humility; shame, embarrassment, and guilt; envy and jealousy; and anger. The book concludes with an analysis of love, sympathy, and empathy as sources of absolute value and the roots of morality.

A masterful contribution, this study of the passions is essential reading for philosophers of mind, psychologists, cognitive neuroscientists, students of Western literature, and general readers interested in understanding the nature of the emotions and their place in our lives.

**P.M.S. Hacker** is the leading authority on the philosophy of Wittgenstein. He is Emeritus Fellow at St John's College, Oxford University, where he was a Tutorial Fellow in philosophy from 1966 to 2006, and has held visiting chairs in North America and both British Academy and Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowships. He is the author of nineteen books and over 150 papers, and has written extensively on the philosophy of Wittgenstein, the history of analytic philosophy, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and cognitive neuroscience.

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## The Passions



*For*

*Robert and Betsy Feinberg*





# Preface

The subject of the human passions has excited the imagination and attracted the attention of philosophers since the pre-Socratics. That is hardly surprising, given the role that emotions play in our lives. We are all subject to joy and delight, to anger and fear, to sadness and grief. That is an intrinsic part of the human condition – for we are purposive, self-conscious, goal-seeking creatures and can recognize what frustrates or facilitates our purposes, and can respond affectively to and reflect upon the achievement of our goals and the maintenance or loss of what we value. We are mammals whose offspring require years to achieve biological maturity, and we are by nature social creatures with an innate capacity for bonding. So we are given to love, loyalty, and affection, and hence also subject to grief and sorrow. We express our emotions in what we do, how we act, and what we say, and we recognize the passions of our fellow human beings in their verbal expressions and behavioural manifestations of emotion. Having a natural propensity to sympathy and empathy, we can share our emotions with others and respond sympathetically to their feelings. Any study of human nature has to investigate the passions, to elucidate our concepts of emotions, and to describe our rich affective vocabulary. For the passions and emotions, collectively and severally, present manifold conceptual problems and provide fertile terrain for conceptual confusion among both philosophers and psychologists. Our problems are not merely intellectual. Human beings are often guided by their emotions, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill. They may be masters of their emotions or in bondage to them. Clarity about the concepts of the emotions is not only a contribution to the

better understanding of human nature; it also facilitates deeper reflection upon our lives and the emotions that beset us. Accordingly this book is not aimed solely at philosophers, who are concerned with the conceptual problems examined here. It is also aimed at psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists, whose conceptual confusions and unclarities are subjected to detailed analysis here. And it is equally aimed at educated readers, who are interested in understanding the nature of the emotions, and in attaining a clearer understanding of the place of emotion in their own lives.

The emotions have an immediate and patent connection with (or with what is thought to be) the beneficial and the detrimental. For we fear and seek to avoid what we perceive as harmful to us or to those whom we cherish. We feel trepidation and anxiety, or anger, at the prospect of anything that threatens our welfare and endangers the good of those to whom we are attached. So the emotions are also perspicuously connected with what is, or is thought to be, good and bad. Our emotional pronenesses and liabilities are partly constitutive of our temperament and personality. Our ability to control our emotions, to keep their manifestations and their motivating force within the bounds of reason, is constitutive of our character as moral agents. So the investigation of the emotions is a fruitful prolegomenon to the philosophical study of morality. It provides a point of access to the elucidation of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice, that skirts the morass of deontological and consequentialist approaches to ethics without neglecting the roles of duties and obligations, or the role of the consequences of our actions in our practical reasoning. Unlike deontology and consequentialism, such an approach highlights the context-bound and ideographic character of much normal moral experience and decision without obscuring the role of principle in the lives of people of integrity. So this book paves the way for a subsequent investigation into axiology and morality.

Because the understanding of the role of the emotions in human life is ideographic rather than nomothetic, the deepest students of the passions are not psychologists, physiological psychologists, or cognitive neuroscientists. Science may study the endless forms of emotional abnormality and aberration, and strive to ameliorate the suffering of those subject to them. It may also investigate, as Darwin and his successors have, the expression of the emotions in animals and man, and explain, in so far as is possible, the evolutionary selection for one emotional propensity as opposed to another. But it can shed relatively

little light on the diverse patterns of socialization of emotions in human communities, let alone upon the shifting history of the emotions in human cultures. For, once mankind acquired sophisticated languages, the nature and scope of emotions and their objects changed beyond anything that could be ascribed to, let alone rendered intelligible to, non-human animals. Mastery of a language made possible second-order emotions (e.g. regret for one's anger, pride in one's fearlessness), as well as objects of emotion that lie in the dated past or future, and abstract and universal objects of emotion (e.g. love of nature, hatred of injustice, compassion for mankind). Mastery of a language not only made man into a rational animal; it also brought human emotions within the scope of reason. For human emotions are normally supported by reasons, are capable of evaluation by the exercise of the faculty of reason, and are subject to control by means of the power of reason.

The deepest students of the role of the emotions in human life are the novelists, dramatists, and poets of our culture. The great novelists depict, in the most profound ways, emotional possibilities in human life, contextualized to a social and cultural form of life, and individualized to fictional characters portrayed in the round with consummate skill. The great dramatists manifest in the dialogues of their plays the roles different emotions may play in human life, the manner in which human beings may be victims of their passions and motivated by them. The great poets give refined articulate form to emotions we all feel but are incapable of crystallizing in such subtle expression. It is for this reason that I decided to illustrate my cultural and conceptual observations by reference to novels, plays, and poems, and to draw on numerous quotations from Western literature. I have not made use of the rich fund of Eastern literature, partly through ignorance, and partly because the conceptions of individual emotions that I chose to examine are conceptions manifest in Western culture, problematized in Western philosophy, and described and articulated in the literature of the West.

It does not require a great deal of reading in the extensive writings on the emotions in antiquity, in Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome (the three roots of Western civilization), to realize that the emotions have a history. They are commonly differently conceived and differently evaluated in different times and places. The extensions of *ahava*, *eros*, *philia*, *agape*, *amor*, and *concupiscentia* are not the same, nor do these terms coincide *exactly* with our concept of love, let alone with our



conception of it (see chapter 10 and Appendix). Pride is a meritorious emotion and attitude of the Aristotelian great-souled man, but the deadliest of sins for the Christian (chapter 5). Shame, but not guilt, is a dominant emotion in the heroic warrior cultures depicted in the *Iliad* and in the Norse sagas, but the role of guilt, repentance, and redemption dominate Jewish and Christian cultures (chapter 6). It is, I believe, important to view the concepts of our various emotions, and indeed our emotions as we conceive them, as features of our culture and products of history. For we shall then realize that emotional phenomena may be, have been, and are differently conceived and understood in different cultures and different times. Very different forms of life rest upon the biological substrate of animal emotion. Consequently, cultural history, in addition to the history of philosophy, plays a far greater role in this book than in its predecessors.

Part I of this volume ‘Sketching the Landscape’ prepares the ground for the investigation of individual emotions. It presents a *distinct idea* of the emotions in chapter 1 by differentiating them from passions in general, affections, and appetites, as well as from agitations, moods, and sentiments. It delineates a *clear idea* of the emotions in chapters 2 and 3, which advance a detailed connective analysis of the concept of emotion. The fourth chapter, ‘The Dialectic of the Emotions’, investigates and rectifies salient misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misconstruals of the emotions by philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive neuroscientists. Part II, ‘Human, All Too Human’, examines a selection of individual emotions: pride, arrogance, and humility; shame, embarrassment, and guilt; envy and jealousy; and anger. Part III, ‘The Saving Graces’, investigates love, friendship, sympathy, and empathy. Why just this selection? It was obviously impossible to examine the whole range, or even the larger part of the range, of human emotions in one book. So selection was unavoidable. It was guided partly by philosophical considerations, and partly by my own puzzlement and curiosity. Pride, arrogance, humility, shame, embarrassment, and guilt are distinctively human emotions of self-assessment. They have been the subject of moralizing and philosophical reflection for more than two thousand years and are intrinsic features of human nature. Their discussion in a work of philosophical anthropology was imperative, and they enabled me to at least touch on a battery of related emotions, such as contempt, regret, remorse, and repentance. Envy and jealousy seemed to me to be two terrible emotions to which human beings are subject. Like arrogance, they destroy the soul of those they hold in their grip. Their differentiation appears

to be increasingly difficult for the younger generation today – and so they seemed good candidates to exemplify what is, alas, human, all too human. Anger, and its cousins, rage and annoyance, are the most ‘animal’ of the emotions I chose to examine. I could equally well have chosen fear (and its cousins, terror, trepidation, and anxiety). Love, feelings of friendship, sympathy, and empathy are investigated in chapters 10 to 12. They are indeed the saving graces of human nature, mitigating our savagery and selfishness. They are sources of absolute value, and provide the roots of morality. Their investigation is necessary for any comprehensive study of human nature. There are many other emotions I should have liked to examine, but considerations of length were a constraint. I hope that the methods of investigation evident in this book will help others to explore, describe, and disentangle the networks of emotions that I have not discussed. Pleasure and happiness are marked by their absence. But they are not emotions. So they will be examined only in the sequel.

This book, *The Passions: A Study of Human Nature*, as its title intimates, is a study in *philosophical anthropology*. The latter term, known to anyone who has studied Kant, is not common in Anglo-Saxon philosophy. That is unfortunate, since it is needed. The subjects studied here and in the previous two volumes of this sequence of essays on human nature encompass much more than can be subsumed under the heading of philosophy of mind or philosophical psychology. The current book is the third in the series that began with the publication in 2007 of *Human Nature: The Categorical Framework*. That examined the most general categorial concepts in terms of which we conceive of ourselves and of the world in which we live: substance, causation, powers and abilities, agency, teleology and teleological explanation, reasons and rational explanation of action, mind, self, body, and person. The second volume, *The Intellectual Powers: A Study of Human Nature*, was published in 2013. It presupposed the results of the first volume, but was designed to be read quite independently of it. In the prolegomenon, it investigated the concepts of consciousness, intentionality, and mastery of a language, which completed the stage-setting for the examination of human cognitive powers – knowledge and belief, sensation and perception, and memory – which was followed by investigations of our cogitative powers, namely thought and imagination. It was my intention to complete the task I had set myself in a third volume, which I prematurely announced as *The Moral Powers: A Study of Human Nature*. It was to fall into three parts: the passions; axiology and human identity, i.e. the

roots of value and the nature of good and evil, character, temperament, and personality; the *summum bonum* – happiness and the meaningful life, and the place of death in life. As I began my work on the emotions, it rapidly became clear that this plan was unrealistic if the project was to be implemented in the manner I wished. So what was intended to be a trilogy would have to be a tetralogy.

This volume, like the previous one, can be read independently of its predecessors. There is nothing here that is unintelligible without knowledge of the first two books. But the results of the previous investigations are presupposed. If a reader wishes to find the reasoning that underpins any controversial claim that is here taken for granted, cross-references to the first and second volumes are given. As in the previous volumes, I have supplied many tables, lists, and diagrams to illustrate the conceptual networks that I trace. The diagrams are not substitutes for the argument of my text, but rather offer rough pictorial representations of distinctions drawn and connective analyses elaborated. They have the merit that they can be taken in at a glance, but they do not aspire to the accuracy of the analyses they illustrate. As in the second volume of the series, I have inserted italicized marginalia to facilitate surveyability, to make it easier to follow the argument, and to assist the reader in locating topics discussed.

I hope to be able to complete this tetralogy on human nature. It was planned as a very large fresco, and I should be sorry to leave it unfinished. But only time will tell whether I shall be able to do so, or whether I have left things too late.

P. M. S. Hacker  
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P. M. S. H.