

Emotion and Imagination

By A. MORTON

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Emotion and Imagination is a book which is original in the best sense of the word—it is bold, independent and full of new insights. For all those reasons I have truly enjoyed reading this book.

The book consists of 33 short chapters (each of them on average six pages long) which are grouped into four bigger parts. The first part of the book, titled ‘The Range of Emotions’, introduces the reader to some of the book’s core ideas about the relation between the emotions on the one hand and imagination on the other. Part II deals with our ‘Imagining Vile Emotions’, Part III considers moral emotions (or ‘Memotions’, as Morton calls them), and Part IV considers various ‘Families of Emotions’.

As a whole, the book is concerned with issues in the philosophy of the emotions, while at the same time emphasizing that, and how, imagination plays an important role in our experiencing the very many different emotions which we do experience on an everyday basis. In Morton’s own words, the main aim of the book is ‘to explain the close link between [emotion and imagination], and how this [close link] allows us to have the wide range of emotions that we do’ (3). In pursuing this project, Morton aims to show that ‘we can have an enormous range of emotions, in part because our flexible imaginations allow us emotions structured around multiple points of view’ (157). This in turn leads on to the question of ‘which emotions are best for us, and when’. And since, as Morton shows in the course of the book, ‘emotions with multiple points of view are central to moral life, [this] question [in turn] allows us to wonder which moral attitudes are harmful, perverse, or counterproductive’ (157).

As this summary might suggest, *Emotion and Imagination* covers a huge range of issues and offers a great number of new insights and very subtle observations. Indeed, a big chunk of the text—maybe as much as half of it—consists of detailed vignettes and real life stories which pertain to the topics at hand. A short review can hardly do such a work justice.

Accordingly, I suggest that we here focus on one of the most central and also most basic topics of the book, namely the question which role imagination might play in our experience of everyday emotions.

At the beginning of the book, Morton boldly claims that

(Bold Claim)

‘[a]ll emotion involves imagination’ (3).

This is a philosophically substantial and very interesting claim. The claim is immediately put to the test with the help of perceptive exemplary cases and possible counter-examples. Given those multi-faceted particular cases, within a page the originally rather bold claim is restated in a ‘more cautious’ way. The more cautious claim is that

(More Cautious Claim)

‘we can draw the boundaries of emotion and imagination so that they fit together in a nice coherent jigsaw, one that is true both to the facts as we know them and to our experience as emoters and imaginers’ (4).

This 'more cautious' claim certainly does differ from the earlier, bolder claim, and while the author's caution is a sign of great sensitivity to particular cases, it also creates some unclarity; for it seems that a defence of the more cautious claim would not by itself entail a defence of the bolder claim.

In the second chapter of the book, titled 'Imagining in Emotion', Morton develops relevant ideas further. More specifically, he introduces a set of ideas which might be summarized as follows:

(Emotion Claim)

'An emotion is a state which generates a range of representations on a given theme, usually with respect to particular objects. These include representations of actions towards the objects, representations of situations that might develop, and representations of results that might be produced.' (14).

(Imagination Claim)

'When we imagine, we represent something to ourselves: a fact, a thing, or a possibility' (8) and 'we are trying to achieve something with the representation, trying to get it to do some job' (9).

(Imagination in Emotion Claim)

'Emotions directed at a topic will drive imagination of associated facts, possibilities, and actions. They have many of their powers by driving [...] us to imagine' (14).

Each of these three claims provides ample material for further discussion, but here we should focus on the last claim, and the overall dialectic which leads to it. It seems that the last claim entails the idea that our ability to imagine things is *constitutive* of our ability to experience emotions. But then, how exactly is this claim supported here? One might be tempted to think that the three claims as outlined constitute an argument, with the first two claims as premises and the last claim as conclusion. Such an argument presumably would have to rely on the additional premise that imagination is the *only* way in which we 'represent something to ourselves'. However, this claim seems false, for it seems perfectly possible to represent something to oneself, for example in thought, without having to rely on imagination (and it would seem to trivialize matters if one were to respond that all thoughts in which one represents something to oneself should count as cases of imagination). Thus, it seems that what Morton offers us here does not support the bold claim that 'all emotion involves imagination'. Nevertheless, the present set of claims might well give us reason to accept that emotion and imagination 'fit together in a nice coherent jigsaw'. Hence, the present set of claims might well give us reason to accept the 'more cautious' claim above, but how exactly the present set of claims are argumentatively related to each other does remain a little vague.

This situation in turn seems characteristic of the book as a whole. *Emotion and Imagination* is a treasure trove of new insights and ideas, but I think the book would have been an even better book had all the many suggestions and ideas presented here been developed in greater systematic and argumentative detail.

Morton himself does, at the beginning of the book, explain that he is 'sure that people's fundamental attitudes are affected more by their emotions and experiences than by argument' (3) and that he therefore, in the book at hand, prefers to 'tell [...]

stories and evok[e] reactions' so as to have 'a chance of influencing [his] readers more deeply' (3). At best, this seems an unorthodox method in a philosophical context, and it might ultimately not count as a satisfactory justification of relevant methodological and stylistic choices for a book conceived of as a book in philosophy. Maybe a better justification of relevant methodological and stylistic choices is offered in the introduction to an earlier monograph (*The Importance of Being Understood*, Routledge 2003, viii), where Morton writes: 'I don't think that philosophy should consist only of definite arguments for clear conclusions [. . .]. We also need suggestive considerations that let us see possibilities that we can then slowly try to deal with.'

Emotion and Imagination certainly does offer a huge amount of very insightful and suggestive considerations, and I am certain that the book will inspire its readers to develop their own views on the issues that are thrown up and made visible here in their own time and in greater detail. It also seems clear that further work on the many possibilities which the present book does let us see will greatly benefit our understanding of the phenomena at hand. Accordingly, I think any philosopher who is interested in either imagination or the emotions should read, and engage with, this book.

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