

The Rationality of Emotions

The Department of Philosophy, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Course no. 15136. (2 HU credits)

2nd semester, 2023

Meeting time: Thursdays, 10:30–12:15

Room: Humanities 2720

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Office: Humanities 5613

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

In this course we will consider some contemporary discussions of the rationality of emotions. Suppose that you fear a little spider or that you're angry at your computer. Are these emotions irrational? In what sense can emotions be assessed as rational? Are emotions like judgments, like perceptions, or are they a different kind of mental occurrence? Can emotions conflict with our beliefs? Are they important for knowing and understanding the world? Can anger against one's oppressor be rational? Can it be rational to regret doing things that we cannot be blamed for? Is it rational to avoid love because it makes us deeply vulnerable?

Goals

The goal is to have a philosophical conversation. We will ask each other the above questions and learn from each other's answers. We will learn how to read a philosophical article, how to discuss a philosophical question and how to write a philosophical essay. We do not expect to complete these tasks, but to make progress toward them.

Ground rules

- a. Mistakes and confusions are the stuff philosophical conversation is made of. Therefore, we shouldn't shy away from mistakes but seek them, help each other understand and resolve them. In making mistakes we're not failing at philosophy, we're doing it.
- b. Some of the topics we'll discuss might raise delicate issues or lead to difficult conversations. This is to be expected because a valuable philosophical conversation teaches us new things about ourselves and about those around us. In order to have such conversations, we must feel sufficiently safe with each other. So we absolutely must respect and be considerate of one another.

Requirements and Assignments

- a. Participation: In order to have a philosophical conversation, all course participants must be present in every class and actively engaged. Participation will constitute 10% of the final grade. If you can't make it to class, please let me know.
- b. Weekly reading-responses: Every week, by Wednesday at noon (the day before we meet), you will post a response to the reading on the shared forum on the course website. The response should be short (I aim to read all of them!) and it will *not* be graded for quality. You're required to submit a total of 10 responses during the term. 10 responses guarantee 20% of the final grade.

- c. Peer Review Essays: Twice during the term you'll be required to submit a two-page essay explaining an argument from one of the papers we will have read. You will then be required to read and comment on a fellow student's essay. Those who receive helpful comments from their peers will be invited (not required) to share them in class and explain why the comments were helpful. The grade is pass/fail. If you submit two essays and grade two essays you're guaranteed 30% of the final grade.
- d. Final essay: The final assignment is a four page essay. It will be submitted on the last day of the semester, June 30th, 2023. The essay will be graded and the grade will count for 40% of the final grade.

Agenda (all readings available on Moodle)

1. 16.3.2023:
First class. No reading.
2. 23.3.2023:
Solomon. 'Emotions and Choice'
3. 30.3.2023:
Taylor. 'Justifying Emotions'
4. 20.4.2023: (submission of first peer-reviewed essay)
Greenspan. 'Emotional Strategies and Rationality'
5. 27.4.2023: (submission of *comments* on peer-reviewed essay)
de Sousa. 'The Rationality of Emotions'
6. 4.5.2023:
Johnston. 'The Authority of Affect'
7. 11.5.2023:
Goldie. 'What Emotions Are, and Their Place in Psychological Explanation'
8. 18.5.2023: (submission of second peer-reviewed essay)
Deonna and Teroni. 'Emotions as Attitudes'
Recommended: Mueller. 'Emotion as Position-Taking'
9. 1.6.2023: (submission of *comments* on second peer-reviewed essay)
Currie. 'Emotions Fit for Fiction'
10. 8.6.2023: (online meeting)
Bell. 'Anger, Virtue, and Oppression'
11. 15.6.2023:
Sussman. 'Is Agent-Regret Rational?'
12. 22.6.2023:

Baier. 'Unsafe Loves'

13. 29.6.2023:

Conference at the Center for Moral and Political Philosophy

30.6.2023: Submission of final essay.