The Role of Emotion in Rational Decision-Making.

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July 2012
Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Pro-Emotion Consensus

1. The Roles of Emotions in Practical Rationality

2. Pro-Emotion Theories

  2.1 Evolutionary Psychology Theories

  2.2 Strategic Theories

  2.3 Perceptual Theories

  2.4 Neo-Jamesian Theories

Chapter Two: Historical Theories of Emotion and Emotions as the Cause of Irrational Behaviour

1. Historical Theories of the Emotions

   1.1 Theories of Emotion in Ancient Greece

   1.1.1 Plato

   1.1.2 Aristotle

   1.1.3 The Stoics

   1.2 Theories of Emotions in the 17th & 18th Century

   1.2.1 Descartes

   1.2.2 Hume

   1.2.3 Kant

2. Historical Theories and the Lack of ‘Anti-Emotion Consensus’

3. Case Studies

   3.1 Recycled Wastewater

   3.2 Emotional Eating

Chapter Three: Strategic & Evolutionary Psychology Theories Revisited

1. Strategic Theories
Abstract

Within philosophy of emotion, there has been the development of a pro-emotion consensus that claims emotion plays a positive and important role within decision-making. It has been suggested that the pro-emotion consensus is replacing ‘traditional’ views of emotion which claim emotion is disruptive to rationality and is often the cause of irrational behaviour; claims which appear to be supported by empirical evidence.

In this thesis I will be examining several pro-emotion theories and historical theories of emotion. I will argue that the suggestion that all historical theories of emotion are ‘anti-emotion’ theories is incorrect and fails to take into account the many differences between historical accounts. In fact, claims made by some of these historical theories are not unlike those made by some pro-emotion accounts; the view that emotion is disruptive to rationality is limited to a small number of historical theories.

Although all pro-emotion theories agree that emotion is necessary for decision-making, there are differences between accounts regarding the exact function emotion serves. I will argue that perceptual pro-emotion theories provide the best explanation of the role of emotion and of emotionally-driven irrational behaviour. I aim to show that the claims made by these perceptual theories and (some) historical theories are compatible and when we combine the insights of these accounts we have a comprehensive explanation of the role of emotions within rational decision-making, which can account for emotionally driven irrational behaviour and still maintain that emotions are necessary for decision-making.
Declaration

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of a number of people. First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my principal supervisor, Dr. Jennie Louise. Throughout the entirety of this thesis your enthusiasm, positivity and support has been unwavering. I’ve learned so much from you – and not just about philosophy or writing a thesis. Thank you so much!

Many thanks to my co-supervisor, Prof. Garrett Cullity, whose feedback and objectivity were immensely helpful in the editing and fine-tuning processes of this thesis. I am most appreciative of your insights and assistance.

Lastly, but not least, thank you to all my family and friends for the continual love and support. Special mention to my parents, Lewis and Kathryn, brother, Daniel and my new husband, Kyle; the four of you kept me going and encouraged me to succeed when I was ready to tear my hair out. Thank you!