

Emotional conflict and social context

Chloë FitzGerald

Abstract: This paper aims to move the debate over the status of the conflict between emotion and judgement forward by refuting three implicit claims: that conflict between emotion and judgement is always to be avoided; that any conflict should always be resolved and, moreover, that it should be resolved immediately; that judgement should usually take priority in any resolution. Refutation of these three claims leads to recognition of the wide variety of different cases of conflict between emotion and judgement; examination of these cases is aided by consideration of the social context in which the conflicts occur.

Keywords: emotion, judgement, social context.

Introduction

Let us start with an example of a straightforward and familiar conflict between one's judgement and emotion that should be familiar to most:

Fear of heights: when suspended high above the earth in a perfectly safe metal cage, one feels afraid. Even though one judges that one is safe, this does not prevent one feeling immense fear at the huge distance between oneself and the ground. There is a sense in which the judgement¹ that one is safe conflicts with one's fear. There is nothing strange or phobic about this fear of heights (example originally from Hume, recently used by Döring (2003, 223)).

In this paper, I will look at some different examples of conflicts between emotion and judgement. I will point to three implicit claims that underlie current debate over the status of these kinds of conflict. Careful consideration of these claims will reveal that they do not make for fruitful investigation. If the conflicts between judgement and emotion are

¹ The judgement referred to throughout is an all-things-considered judgement.

viewed as something always to be avoided or immediately resolved in favour of the judgement, there is less room for consideration of a wide range of cases. In discussion of these conflicts, one is apt to subsume them all under one heading, but this ignores important differences. Furthermore, when looking at different kinds of conflicting state of mind, more thought should be given to the social context in which they are experienced. For example, *fear of heights* could be a problem in some situations when it impedes one from carrying out a particular task, but this depends on the social context in which it occurs. It could also be a pleasurable conflict if it is experienced as a game played with other people. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Before explaining the status of the debate, a little of the background against which it has arisen should be sketched. There is a current trend in philosophy of emotion for what can broadly be termed 'perceptual' accounts of emotion: some of these theories argue that emotion is a kind of perception; others argue that emotion is analogous to perception or involves perception in an important way.² This trend towards perceptual theories springs from a desire to show that emotions can have representational content without the need to assimilate them to judgements or beliefs.

Perceptual theories of emotion

One thought behind these accounts is that emotion is similar to sense perception. An interesting feature they sometimes share is what is known as informational encapsulation, a phenomenon sometimes claimed to indicate the presence of a mental module, a mental system separated from other cognitive processes (Griffiths 1997, 93). A mental process is informationally encapsulated when it is unaffected by information stored in other cognitive systems. If a process is informationally encapsulated, it will also be cognitively impenetrable, which means that it is not affected by a person's beliefs or assumptions. Both these features can be a matter of degree, so that a process can be more or less encapsulated or penetrable. An example of an informationally encapsulated

² Those who argue that emotion is a kind of perception include Jesse Prinz (2004), Sabine Döring (2008) and Robert C. Roberts (2003). Those who argue that it is importantly analogous include Ronald de Sousa (1987) and Peter Goldie (2000).

emotion is a case such as *fear of heights*, where the fear remains unaffected by the belief that being in the cage is not dangerous in any way. An example from perception would be a case where one's belief that one was experiencing a visual illusion did not prevent one from continuing to perceive the illusion. This feature is part of what makes both emotion and perception seem to be passive experiences. Another factor is that both are typically responses to stimuli in one's environment.³ Furthermore, perception and emotion are both responses to one's environment as experienced from a particular viewpoint; this seems to be a necessary part of their phenomenology.

One of the issues that perceptual accounts promise to address concerns the relationship between emotion and judgement. It is argued that they explain how conflict can occur between emotion and reason more satisfactorily than the 'judgementalist' and 'feeling' theories, as they are sometimes known. Briefly, judgementalist theories identify emotions with judgements or evaluative beliefs, the most famous and pioneering example being Robert Solomon's theory of emotions as strategic judgements (Solomon 1976).⁴ Feeling theories follow the tradition of William James in identifying emotions with bodily feelings, or perceptions of bodily changes (e.g. Damasio 1994).

If emotions are judgements or bodily feelings, it is difficult to explain cases where we judge something to be the case, yet our emotions conflict with this judgement. One of the most commonly used examples is that of phobias: phobics desperately fear things, such as flying or snakes, which they know and judge to be perfectly safe. However, it is probably better not to use examples of phobias, as they make the phenomenon appear exaggerated and unusual, when it is actually very common and everyday, as *fear of heights* demonstrates. Most people feel fear when suspended at a great height, or looking over a precipice, despite knowing that they are safe.

If emotions are judgements, *fear of heights* must be explained as a case of someone holding contradictory judgements and so being paradigmatic-

³ However, an important difference is that emotions can also be provoked by other mental states, such as when one imagines or remembers a situation.

⁴ In recent years, Solomon modified his theory a little to account for the difference between an emotional judgement and a 'cold' judgement, while still maintaining his original claim that emotions were judgements (see Solomon 2003 and 2004).

ically irrational. One judges that one is in danger of falling (the emotional judgement of fear) at the same time as one judges that one is not in danger (unemotional judgement). This seems too strong a conclusion to draw, as it would entail that most of us hold contradictory states of mind very frequently.⁵ It also fails to explain why we find it so difficult to correct the emotional judgement in line with the unemotional one to make our judgements consistent. If they are both judgements, why does the emotional one persist even when we are convinced of the truth of the unemotional judgement?

On the other hand, if emotions are bodily feelings, there is no good explanation for the conflict that one feels in these situations. A bodily feeling, such as pain, is not the kind of thing that can conflict with a judgement. Yet in the case of the common *fear of heights*, one may feel a conflict between what one judges to be the case and one's fear. One might try to control the fear by affirming the judgement to oneself, repeating to oneself, "I'm perfectly safe; there's nothing to fear.", indicating that the emotion and the judgement are somehow in conflict. If one has a pain, yet judges that one has not been hurt, one would not experience this kind of conflict. One might wonder how it was that one was in pain and try to find an explanation, but one would not feel the need to 'correct' the pain with one's judgement; a pain is not usually considered something that can conflict with one's judgements. Peter Goldie sums up the problem for judgementalists and feeling theorists, saying 'what we want is conflict without contradiction, and the former give us more than we want, while the latter give us less than we want' (Goldie 2006).

A perceptual theory of emotion, on the other hand, is able to draw a nice analogy between the emotion case and the visual case, making use of examples such as the Müller-Lyer illusion:

Müller-Lyer: this is a case of visual illusion in which two parallel lines continue to appear to the perceiver to be of different lengths, even when it has been proved to her with a ruler that they are actually of the same length. Trusting the ruler, she judges that they are the same length, but perceives them as different lengths.

⁵ It is difficult to conceive of someone of sound mind knowingly holding contradictory beliefs.

Müller-Lyer is thought to be comparable to the emotional case, where one judges that one is not in danger, yet feels fear. In both cases, the perceptual or emotional evaluation persists and conflicts with the judgement, due to the partial informational encapsulation of both emotion and perception. It is argued that this parallel provides support for the likening of emotion to perception (Döring 2008; Roberts 2003).

Is conflict between emotion and judgement a conflict of reason?

There is current debate over the rationality of the conflict between emotion and judgement, due in part to an objection brought against the perceptual model of emotion by Bennett Helm (Helm 2001, 41). Helm objects that the perceptual model of emotion does not fully accommodate the fact that the conflict between an emotion and a judgement is a conflict of reason. He argues that someone who is subject to conflict between belief and emotion is open to criticism as being irrational, while it is not considered irrational to be subject to conflict between belief and perception. He concludes that emotion must be closer to judgement than the perceptual theorists allow and should not be assimilated to perception (Helm 2001, 41 – 43).

There have been several attempts to answer Helm's objection. Robert C. Roberts argues that the conflict is a conflict of reason in the case of emotion because emotions are about what matters to the subject, his concerns. Someone who feels fear when he knows there is no danger is troubled by the conflict because fear is about something that concerns him, a part of him. When he sees a visual illusion, on the other hand, the conflict of his perception with his judgement does not worry him because the perception does not involve his concerns (Roberts 2003, 92). However, as Michael Brady notes, this response does not seem completely convincing, as a perception can involve one's concerns in a similar way. As Brady points out, perception plausibly involves our concerns all the time; we clearly have a deep concern that our visual perception be accurate, so this does not explain the difference (Brady 2007, 277). Furthermore, this response seems to address more the issue of why the conflict is troubling, rather than why it is a conflict of reason.

Döring argues in a similar vein to Roberts that the cognitive conflict is actually the same in both cases, as the perception and the emotion

represent their contents as having the appearance of truth for the subject, while her judgement denies this appearance. She claims that the reason the emotional conflict seems different is because it usually entails a practical, as well as cognitive, conflict (Döring 2008). This is a good point, but is probably not satisfying for Helm, who would push the fact that we tend to reason with our emotions when they conflict with our judgements in a way in which we appear not to do with our perceptions.⁶

Brady provides an alternative account of why the conflict is a conflict of reason in the emotion case and not in the perceptual case, despite the likeness of emotion to perception. He argues that the difference is a result of the fact that emotions focus one's attention on particular objects or aspects of a situation and hold attention there. Perceptions do not typically hold one's attention, unless an emotion is involved. In the case of 'recalcitrant' emotions, as Brady terms them, this focus of attention is a waste of energy, as one has already made a judgement about the situation and does not need to focus attention on it any longer; hence the emotion is irrational. As perceptions do not hold one's attention in the same way, energy is not wasted in the visual illusion and it is not irrational (Brady 2007, 278 - 279).

Once again, Helm would probably not be happy with this response because the sense in which Brady is assessing the conflict for rationality is a strategic sense and different from the one Helm intended. If one's end is to conserve one's resources, the fact that resources are wasted unnecessarily in the conflict of judgement with emotion makes it an irrational state. Helm wanted to show that the conflict between emotion and judgement was a conflict of reason, not because it involved waste of resources and so was irrational in this strategic sense, but because one could reason one's way out of the conflict and adjust one's emotion accordingly, in a way that he argues is not possible with perception.

Once different notions of rationality come into play, the debate comes up against a difficult sticking point because there is such a variety of opinion over how emotion should be assessed for rationality and what

⁶ In fact, we do actually reason with our visual perceptions to an extent, as Döring points out. She calls it 'calibrating' and gives the example of when we are in a station and are unsure whether our train is moving. Once we have decided that we are not moving, our perceptual experience adjusts itself accordingly (Döring 2008). We seem able to adjust some perceptual experiences more easily than others, as the Müller-Lyer is surprisingly resistant to such calibration.

kind of criteria should be used. Rather than tackling the thorny issue of rationality here, I would like to suggest a different way in which the debate could move forward. There are three implicit assumptions that are often made by those involved in the debate and I argue that they should be reviewed and challenged.

Three implicit assumptions

In much of the discussion in the literature, it seems that the following things are assumed about conflict between emotion and judgement:

1. *Conflict between emotion and judgement is always something to be avoided.* This assumption is revealed by the way the conflict is usually negatively labelled. For example, the term 'recalcitrant emotion', which Brady uses, suggests that the conflict is primarily a problem to be solved and, as we saw, most accept that the conflict is 'irrational' in some sense. Brady also calls it a 'waste of attentional resources', which smacks of something to be avoided (Brady 2007, 281).

2. *Any conflict between emotion and judgement should always be resolved and, moreover, it should be resolved immediately.* This claim is a natural follow-up to claim 1. If the conflict is something to be avoided, when it does occur, it makes sense to want to be rid of it as soon as possible. This assumption is clear if one notes the emphasis in the literature on quick resolution that involves dropping either the emotion or the judgement. The various stages of development in the conflict itself are rarely mentioned and the possibility of leaving the conflict unresolved is not considered. For example, Döring emphasises resolution of the conflict as an immediate result of realising an error in judgement (Döring 2008).

3. *The conflict between emotion and judgement should usually be resolved in favour of the judgement.* Döring, for example, argues that judgment should always win in the first instance in order to resolve the conflict rationally. She allows that one can learn from the emotion later, but only when the conflict itself has been resolved in favour of the judgement (Döring 2008). Helm argues explicitly that judgement has priority and that its relationship with emotion is asymmetrical:

Judgment, as a matter of active assent, has a special place in this pattern as normally prior to felt evaluation both as an articulation of the perspective that is genuinely one's own and, therefore, as rational. Nonetheless, I have argued, this priority can be overturned in particular cases (Helm 2001, 160).

In order to tackle these three assumptions, let us begin by looking at some examples of conflict that are used in the literature:

Theatre-going: somebody raised in a strict religious sect was taught to view theatre-going as sinful. As an adult, he has completely rejected this judgement. However, he cannot help feeling guilty when he goes to the theatre (John Rawls's example, cited in Brady 2007, 274).

Huck Finn: at a crucial point in Mark Twain's novel, Huckleberry Finn has a pang of conscience about having helped his slave friend, Jim, to run away. He judges that he ought to turn Jim in to the slave-hunters, as they have both committed a serious crime by 'stealing' someone's legal property. However, at the moment when he has the opportunity to turn him in, his sympathy for Jim prevents him and he lies (first used by Jonathan Bennett, 1974, and thereafter much discussed in the literature).

Huck Finn has something in common with *theatre-going*, and both are somewhat different from *fear of heights* mentioned previously. *Fear of heights* involves a relatively straightforward emotion, informationally encapsulated in a way that is plausibly similar to the encapsulation of one's perception in *Müller-Lyer*. The guilt and the feelings of sympathy and friendship felt in *theatre-going* and *Huck Finn* are much more complex and sophisticated emotions; they are not so clearly informationally encapsulated in the way that fear often seems to be.

Furthermore, *theatre-going* and *Huck Finn* both involve normative conflicts, which is one of the reasons why they are more complex. *Theatre-going* involves a former negative evaluation of theatre as sinful and the moral norm that one should not go to the theatre; these remain from the theatre-goer's upbringing in the form of his emotional response to theatre-going. This emotional response is in conflict with his current positive evaluation of theatre and his lack of support for a norm prohibiting theatre-going; this is shown by his judgement that it is perfectly acceptable to go to the theatre. Huck's emotions of sympathy and friendship for Jim are in conflict with the moral norm prescribed by his society, which states that one should not help slaves to escape. Huck accepts this norm as part of his morality, unlike the theatre-goer, who rejects the norm from his past. It is only Huck's strong emotional response that prevents him from following the norm.

It is clear that there is much to be gained by exploring cases similar to *Huck Finn* and *theatre-going*, but some of this exploration can only be done once the three implicit assumptions have been brought to light and questioned. Let us turn to these assumptions.

Claim 1

Claim 1 is that conflicts between emotion and judgement should always be avoided. Looking at the social context of conflicts will help to show that this is not always the case. Here is an example of a different kind of conflict:

Fairground: people derive pleasure from fairground rides through their feeling of fear. This fear arises despite the judgement that one is safe. The conflict or, at least, the disparity between the fear that one feels and the judgement that one is safe is actually what one seeks in this kind of experience; both are necessary for the pleasure in the activity.⁷ If one is not afraid at all, the experience is boring; if one does not judge that one is actually perfectly safe, one is too terrified and there is no pleasure in this.

If we assume here that pleasure is something good and not generally to be avoided then *fairground* shows claim 1 to be false. When one suffers from *fear of heights*, but this time when standing on a cliff, this could be problematic, as it may prevent one from continuing one's path. On the other hand, it may not be, if one is among others who all feel the same and laugh about it together. Here is a similar example:

Glass floor: when a bar is built on the thirtieth floor of a building with a glass floor, the customers take delight in experiencing fear of heights together. This case is similar to *fairground* in that the fear of heights is sought out and the pleasure gained is derived from the combination of this fear and the judgement that one is safe.

⁷ The example of the enjoyment at the fairground will bring to mind the much-discussed paradox of tragedy and paradox of horror in aesthetics. It is puzzling how one can enjoy the fear that one feels when watching a horror film about a serial killer and not enjoy fear when being actually chased by a serial killer. Perhaps the social context can also help to explain these cases, as it is partly social context that determines the practice of fiction and story-telling, but it is not within the scope of this article to discuss this debate.

The problem with claim 1 shown up by *glass floor* and *fairground* is the 'always'. Whether a conflict between emotion and judgement is something to be avoided depends partly on the social context. If one feels fear of something in a social context in which it is not normal to feel fear, this may cause more problems than if everyone else feels afraid with one. This is the case with many phobias, which are problematic either because they are abnormal fears, or because they are abnormally intense and strong fears. Perhaps if everyone were to have the same intense fear of the same thing, this fear would not be called a 'phobia', even if this fear conflicted with one's judgement. Imagine the following scenario:

Fear of dark: an imaginary historical society could all share an intense fear of the dark, although all were aware that there was nothing really to fear because the dark held few dangers. The conflict that everyone would experience between their fear and their judgement would not be of the kind that caused problems; no one would leave her house after dark and there would be no significant nocturnal social activity. No one would worry about this fear conflicting with the accepted judgement that there was no danger, nor would the fear be considered pathological.

On the other hand, in contemporary Western culture, this same conflict between fear of the dark and judgement that it was safe would be considered a problem and probably a phobia. In a context where it is usual to go out after dark and much socialising is conducted in this way, fear of the dark would be a serious social handicap. In this case, the failure of the fear to 'come into line', as it were, with the judgement would be extremely troublesome and worrying.

It could be objected at this point that a phobia should be defined objectively, as 'fear of the non-dangerous'⁸, or something of the sort. Under this definition, the society described previously could be argued to be suffering from a collective phobia, even if perfectly comfortable with their situation. *Fairground* and *glass floor* could also be seen to show phobic tendencies in people because they involve fear of things that are not dangerous. It seems likely that whether a particular fear is classed as a

⁸ There is no room here to go into the difficulties of specifying what is objectively dangerous. Suffice to say that it does not correspond to the things that most of us regularly fear e.g. people are apt to fear flying more than riding in a car, although a car accident is much more likely and hence riding in a car is much more dangerous.

phobia has more to do with the social context than this kind of definition allows. The way in which phobias are clinically classified may be more to do with whether a fear is in some way debilitating than whether it is a fear of something 'non-dangerous'.⁹

To return for a moment to the analogy with visual illusions, where there is conflict between a perception and a judgement, there are also indications that the social context has influence. The conflict is pleasurable as long as we are sure that others experience it in the same way, as in *Müller-Lyer*, which is enjoyable, the kind of visual trick that we like to play on ourselves. This is partly because we know that everyone is seeing the lines as different lengths. There is nothing wrong with our own visual equipment. When we are the only ones to see something, a visual illusion can also be disturbing:

⁹ Here is an example of criteria used to classify 'specific phobia':

- 'The patient experiences a strong, persistent fear that is excessive or *unreasonable*. It is cued by a specific object or situation that is either present or anticipated.
- The phobic stimulus almost always immediately provokes an anxiety response, which may be either a panic attack or symptoms of anxiety that do not meet criteria for a panic attack.
- The fear is *unreasonable or out of proportion, and the patient realizes this*. The patient either avoids the phobic stimulus or endures it with severe anxiety or distress.
- Patient is under the age of 18, but must have had the symptoms for 6 months or longer.
- Either there is *marked distress about this fear or it markedly interferes with the patient's usual routines or social, job or personal functioning*.

(http://www.psychnet-uk.com/dsm_iv/specific_phobias.htm, my italics)

In this example, there is reference to whether the fear distresses the patient or interferes with her daily life. With the imaginary society who feared the dark, this would not be the case, hence they would not meet this criterion. Interestingly, there are two references to the fear being 'unreasonable', in the eyes of the patient and more generally. Unlike the word 'rational', 'reasonable' seems to involve standards set by those around one more than the internal relations between one's mental states. For example, Thomas Scanlon argues convincingly that something can be reasonable while being irrational. He claims that reasonableness is a criterion always applied relative to a specified body of information and range of reasons with a general aim in mind (Scanlon 1998, 32 – 33). In this sense, it could be a criterion applied relative to the social context. This would suggest that the diagnosis of the phobic depends very much on whether the fear is viewed as reasonable in the social context in which it occurs. The society who feared the dark could plausibly view their fear as reasonable within their social context, even though they were aware that there was not any real danger in the dark.

Cockroaches: I am the only person in the room to experience a visual illusion of cockroaches, but am sure that there are no actual cockroaches present. I am severely worried and want to see a psychologist or some specialist who can find out what is wrong with me.

Like the person in *cockroaches*, one would want to see a therapist if one was the only one to experience an intense fear that conflicted with one's judgement. One might be worried that it was a phobia. Visual illusions, as well as conflicts between emotion and judgement, can be of quite different kinds and are influenced by the context in which they are experienced.

It is important to notice that the examples picked out in the debate over conflict between emotion and judgement are usually problematic cases, which emphasise the conflict as something negative, a problem needing to be solved. Examples of a fear that cannot be conquered are common, but cases where the fear may be sought out for itself are never discussed. These show that the conflict can be enjoyable. Even in the more complex cases, where values and norms are involved, it is arguable that conflict may not be necessarily a bad thing. In fact, as shown by *Huck Finn*, it could be seen as a fruitful and productive part of one's mental life (Goldie 2008).

Cases of conflict will differ in this respect. In *theatre-going*, the theatre-goer may find the conflict an annoying remnant of his past, something that disrupts an activity that he enjoys. In this case, he may feel that the guilt is 'irrational' and wish to rid himself of it through therapy. It does not seem that the conflict is adding anything particularly important or rich to his mental life.

However, in *Huck Finn*, most would agree that the conflict is valuable, in the sense that it leads Huck to make what most would consider the right decision. Without the emotion springing up to conflict with his judgement, which is part of his socially-acquired set of values, Huck would have acted on that judgement. If the conflict were to lead Huck to go further and to question this set of values and reassess his moral code,¹⁰ as part of a complex process of moral reasoning and deliberation, the conflict would have greater value. This would include the value of leading to useful modifications and reassessments of one's moral code

¹⁰ Something Huck fails to do, as Bennett notes (Bennett 1974, 10).

and of experiencing and reflecting upon different and conflicting sources for one's moral judgement. The resulting confusion and conflict can be valuable as a rewarding self-learning experience (Goldie 2008).

Conflicts may be valuable for different reasons, depending on the case. Another scenario in which one might value a conflicting response would be a kind of 'dirty hands' case, in which someone is justified in performing an action that is morally wrong. There is some disagreement in moral philosophy as to whether dirty hands cases do actually exist, as they present possible conceptual problems for ethical theories. However, at least some within the field argue that there can be instances where a morally wrong action is justified overall, yet that the actor is also right to feel guilty and regret the action because of its wrongness (e.g. Stocker 1992, 9 – 36). If this is accepted, such a case is one in which the appropriate response to the situation is a conflict between emotion and judgement. This conflicting response has value, as it means that the actor appreciates the subtlety of the situation and that she responds to certain features of it in a way that is valuable for her moral character. Let us take an example from Michael Stocker:

Shipwreck: one is forced to choose those who will be saved from a shipwreck according to their religion or race, under the threat that if one does not choose in this fashion, all the lifeboats will be destroyed (Stocker 1992, 20). Many would argue that one was justified in this case in choosing according to religion or race, as it would be better to save some, even on these unfair grounds, than none at all. However, it would also seem to be appropriate to feel guilty about having to make this choice, despite judging that it is the right thing to do overall.

The value in having a conflict between one's guilt and one's moral judgement here is not only instrumental to one's capabilities of moral reasoning, as one makes a decision; the conflict is also valuable as part of one's character. If one fails to feel guilt in this kind of case, it might be detrimental to one's moral character in the future. Assuming that it is appropriate to feel guilt when performing an action such as this, if one fails to feel it in this case, one's general disposition to feel guilt in this kind of situation might be at risk. It could mean that, confronted with the prospect of performing a similar action without the threat, one would not be disposed to feel guilt; one could become accustomed to making this kind of choice based on unfair grounds, even when unjusi-

fied by other circumstances. The conflict between emotion and judgement seems to have value for one's character in this kind of case. Moreover, we would think less of someone who did not feel guilty at having done what is, all things considered, the right thing.

So far, there are at least three ways in which the conflict between emotion and judgement can be valuable, or, at least, not something to be avoided: as an intrinsic part of the enjoyment of certain experiences (*fairground* and *glass floor*); as an aid to making the right decision and as part of the development of one's moral reasoning (*Huck Finn*); as an appropriate response to a complex moral dilemma that safeguards one's good character (*shipwreck*).

Claim 2

Claim 2 is that conflicts between emotion and judgement should always be resolved and, moreover, that they should be resolved immediately. The previous examples throw this into doubt. If a conflict can be valuable, it could be reasonable to concentrate on the conflict itself and enjoy it, rather than resolving it at all (*fairground* and *glass floor*), to dwell on it as a valuable tool for arriving at a particular decision and for improving one's moral reasoning (*Huck Finn*) or to welcome and sustain it as part of the appropriate response demonstrating good moral character (*shipwreck*). It can also be deliberately helpful to 'sleep on' a conflict that one experiences. If one thinks of emotional troubles in personal relationships, sometimes a quick resolution of these conflicts is the last thing one would want to aim at. One may need time to dwell on the conflict in order to find the solution. For example:

Couple: both halves of a couple are experiencing conflicts between their emotions and their judgements over whether to end their relationship. They feel love for each other and fear at the prospect of being alone again, but judge that the relationship is not working. They need time to think through the conflicts, as this may bring up further relevant considerations. Couples rarely end a relationship suddenly, as they usually need time to reflect and discuss things further in order to make an appropriate decision.

Furthermore, some conflicts that one experiences may never be resolved and this may not necessarily be a bad thing. The conflict resulting from

shipwreck is somewhat like this, as most would not want the person's guilt to disappear, despite his having made the decision to follow his judgement. The conflict will remain unresolved in the sense that the guilt will continue to conflict with the judgement whenever his thought turns to the matter. This does not appear to be a lamentable occurrence. Few of us live a perfectly harmonious life in which we are completely emotionally at ease with all our current and past choices and decisions. This does not necessarily make us unbalanced or unstable, unless the conflicts are extreme; it is often what makes our lives, characters and relationships richer. Here is another example:

Secret ambition: a man decided at some point in the past to sacrifice his artistic ambition to become a painter and to pursue a more stable career so that he could support his family. He has made his choice and he continues throughout his life to judge that it was the right thing to do. He may also continue throughout his life to experience a conflicting emotion of regret at not following the path of the artist, but this does not have to be a negative aspect of his emotional make-up. It may be an important and positive aspect of his character and something that allows him to relate to those around him in a richer way.

In *secret ambition*, the person may not want to resolve the conflict in the sense that he wants the judgement to win out against the emotion. He has resolved it insofar as he continues to stand by his judgement and this is what guides his actions, but the conflicting emotion does not dissolve or disappear because of this resolution. He would not want it to disappear and neither would those who know and love him, as he would not be the same person in this case. Seen under this light, the unresolved tension in the conflict is valuable to him as part of his character.

It may be objected at this point that it is not so much conflict itself that is valuable, but resolution of conflict. It could be argued that one enjoys *fairground* and *glass floor* because the conflict (if there is one at all) is resolved; the fear experienced is in harmony with the judgement that the ride is not dangerous and is, perhaps, a different kind of fear from 'real' fear, a kind that does not conflict with judgements of safety. As for *Huck Finn*, *shipwreck*, *couple* and *secret ambition*, it could be claimed that the conflict itself does not provide any benefit as long as it remains unresolved. It is only the resolution of the conflict that can

lead to the right decision, develop one's moral reasoning, maintain one's good character, decide the course of a relationship or lead to a good life choice.

This objection seems to arise from the idea that any kind of mental conflict is something negative and messy, only useful once resolved. If we pause for a moment and think about our everyday mental lives, this picture of the role of mental conflict seems less plausible. The richness and diversity of our mental life is in part constituted by the mental conflicts and confusions that we experience. These conflicts and confusions are plausibly valuable in themselves, not only as ways in which to arrive at a state of complete harmony and lack of conflict. Most of us would not want to arrive at such a state; the idea of having all one's desires, beliefs and emotions in perfect co-ordination sounds strangely inhuman. We may well strive towards this as a regulative ideal, but this does not mean that the conflicts that make up our inner lives have only instrumental value. There seems to be room for recognising them as valuable in themselves, as even something to aim for, in a sense.¹¹ At the very least, there seems to be room for debate over the relative merits of mental conflict versus harmony and the idea that conflict might be valuable in itself should not be dismissed out of hand.

Claim 3

Claim 3 is that conflicts should usually be resolved in favour of the judgement. In other words, there should be a strong bias towards the judgement. The point of *Huck Finn* is to show that emotion ought to sometimes win the conflict and that it may be one's judgement that should be changed.¹² There are other cases that can be used to show this.

Dodgy salesman: an example from Patricia Greenspan will help here. She describes a case where a salesman comes to sell one something at home. The householder judges him to be trustworthy (he has the proper documentation), but stops short of signing a contract because of a conflicting feeling of distrust. There is something about this man that makes him feel suspicious; he seems 'dodgy' (Greenspan 1988,

¹¹ For further discussion of this and of single-mindedness as a dubious ideal, see Goldie (2008).

¹² In Bennett's article, the conflict is couched in terms of sympathy versus principle.

chapter 1). We might think it quite reasonable in this case to let one's emotion of distrust override one's judgement that he was a perfectly legitimate salesman. The householder's emotion might be a response to some indicator of the salesman's real nature that he is unable to pick up through conscious reasoning methods. It would not be surprising to learn afterwards that the salesman was, in fact, a con man and that the householder's emotion had correctly picked up on some of his body language.

I think that *Huck Finn* and *dodgy salesman* are not particularly unusual or strange cases. However, exploration of their full implications seems to be resisted by many engaged in the debate. This fact is somewhat surprising, as those involved in the debate are usually in favour of accounts of emotion at the cognitive end of the spectrum. This is one of the attractions of perceptual accounts in the first place and Helm's objection is due to the fact that he wants emotions to be more like judgements than perceptions, in a sense, even more 'cognitive'. One of the main motives for providing a cognitive account of emotions is to allow them to have an important role in moral reasoning; this would mean allowing the possibility that they could trump judgements, not just as an occasional aberration, but on a regular basis.

Conclusions

A closer look at the social context and at a wider range of cases has suggested that the conflict between emotion and judgement does not have to be seen as inherently problematic. Whether the conflict is seen as a problem may depend partly on the social context in which it occurs. Looking at a wide range of conflicts helps to avoid placing all cases of conflict under one bracket.

I suggest three claims to replace those discussed:

1. Conflict between emotion and judgement is sometimes something to be avoided and is sometimes something valuable that may be sought out.
2. Where there is conflict between emotion and judgement, it should sometimes be resolved immediately and sometimes dwelt on at length, prolonged or even left in an unresolved state.

3. The conflict between emotion and judgement should sometimes be resolved in favour of the judgement and sometimes in favour of the emotion.¹³

Department of Philosophy
University of Manchester
chloefitzgerald@hotmail.com

References

- BENNETT, J. (1974): The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn. *Philosophy* 49, No. 188. April, 123 – 134.
- BRADY, M. (2007): Recalcitrant Emotions and Visual Illusions. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, No. 3, 273 – 84.
- DAMASIO, A. (1994): *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books.
- DE SOUSA, R. (1987): *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- DÖRING, S. (2003): Explaining Action by Emotion. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53, No. 211, 214 – 30.
- DÖRING, S. (2008): Conflict without Contradiction. In BRUN, G. – DOGUOGLU, U. – KUENZLE, D. (eds.): *Epistemology and Emotions*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 83 – 104.
- GOLDIE, P. (2000): *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- GOLDIE, P. (2006): Getting feelings into emotion in the right way. (unpublished manuscript).
- GOLDIE, P. (2008): The Mess Inside. (unpublished manuscript).
- GREENSPAN, P. (1988): *Emotions and reasons: an inquiry into emotional justification*. London: Routledge.
- GRIFFITHS, P. (1997): *What Emotions Really Are*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- HELM, B. (2001): *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation and the Theory of Value*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- KOLODNY, N. (2005): Why Be Rational? *Mind* 114, No. 455, July, 509 – 563.
- PRINZ, J. (2004): *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Manchester PhD. seminar, December 2007, and at the 'Emotions and Intentionality' conference of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Prague, April 2008. I would like to thank Peter Goldie, Julian Dodd, Jonathan Quong and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper and all those who asked helpful questions at presentations.

- ROBERTS, R. C. (2003): *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SAMUELS, R. – STICH, S. – FAUCHER, L. (2004): Reason and Rationality. In NIINILUOTO, I. – SINONTEN, M. – WOLENSKI, J. (eds.): *Handbook of Epistemology*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1 – 50.
- SCANLON, T.M. (1998): *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- SOLOMON, R. (1976): *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- SOLOMON, R. (2003): What is a “Cognitive Theory” of the Emotions? In HATZIMOYSIS, A. (ed.): *Philosophy and the Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1 – 18.
- Specific Phobia*, retrieved from http://www.psychnet-uk.com/dsm_iv/specific_phobias.htm on 27th February, 2008.
- STOCKER, M. (1992): *Plural and Conflicting Values*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.