

# Emotion, an Organ of Happiness

Ruey-Yuan Wu

National Tsing-Hua University

## Introduction: How did it all begin?

In view of the success of modern sciences, philosophers have been trying to come up with a view of human beings, which aspires to reconcile the basic assumptions implicit in modern sciences (such as the idea of causal determinism) with what we think we are, what we think our dignities as human beings lie (e.g., that we have free wills, that we are rational agents). This project of reconciliation is not peculiar to traditional philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Rather, it continues to set the stage for heated debates in contemporary philosophy, especially in the domains of mind and value. It is more or less agreed that we should give up theistic or teleological discourses because of their alleged incompatibility with a scientific world view, but it has not yet been settled how we are to do justice to the nature of our own mind and value. Can we account for the special characteristics of mental phenomena (e.g., the subjective character of conscious states, the intentionality of propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires) with a purely physical language? Similarly, can we account for the nature of value (its normative force, its reason-giving power) in a naturalistic language? For many who are engaged in a naturalizing project (both in the philosophy of mind and in moral philosophy), the project of reconciliation should be conceived as a project of total disenchantment: everything (consciousness, intentionality, values, and what not) can all be explained in terms of physical concepts in the broad sense, and there is nothing in nature that can escape the causal-nomological network. And yet, there is a strong resistance to the naturalist's idea of total disenchantment: on the anti-naturalist's view, it is human minds and values, or more precisely, their close connections to reasons, that put human beings beyond the bounds of nature (in the narrow sense), and grant them a very special status among other living things. The debate between naturalists and anti-naturalists is real and significant, but too wide-ranging for us to keep scores along the way.

I am an anti-naturalist, and I see the philosophers' debate on emotions as a variation on the common theme of reconciliation (reconciliation as total disenchantment or re-enchantment): naturalists would most likely opt for some version of feeling theory (according to which emotions are just bodily feelings, not serving any cognitive function and not subject to rational assessment), and anti-naturalists, some version of judgment theory (according to which emotions are a

species of evaluative judgments, assessable as correct or incorrect, rational or irrational). In this paper, I shall try to defend a version of judgment theory, claiming that emotions are a sort of evaluative judgments, made from a personal concern with living a good life. In the rest of the paper, I shall first lay down, from an anti-naturalist point of view, a landscape of mind, and then consider how we are to find a proper place for emotions. Second, I shall get into the core of my judgment theory by answering the following questions: What sort of (evaluative) judgments are emotions? How do emotions as a species of judgment differ from beliefs and desires? Why is this sort of evaluative judgments indispensable, or essential to living a reflective life? What are the constraints for assessing the correctness or rationality of this sort of evaluative judgments? Third, I shall try to explain how various phenomena about emotions such as embodiedness, intensity, passivity, transience, and belief-independence--which are usually taken to pose challenges to the judgment theory--can be taken into account in my judgment theory. In the end, I shall try to shed some light on the status and the limits of intentional psychology.

### I. the Place of Emotions in Mind's Landscape

In the contemporary philosophy of mind, mental states are divided into two groups: experiences (including perceptions and sensations) and attitudes (such as beliefs and desires). Experiences are characterized by their subjective character: for a person who has a certain experience, there is something it is like to have that experience. And the subjective character of experience is essentially tied to a singular point of view, available to beings who share the same physiological make-up. In contrast, attitudes such as beliefs and desires are characterized by their directedness to the world (or intentionality), in terms of which they can in turn be assessed semantically, as true/false or satisfied/dissatisfied. Furthermore, it is notable that experiences (as mental events which are not mental activities) are passive in the sense that it makes no sense to ask for reasons for our having a certain experience, while it is always a valid question to ask whether a certain attitude (whose occurrent form is always a mental activity) is rationally grounded or not. Although it makes no sense to speak of a rational ground for our experience, the fact of our having a certain experience may serve as a rational ground for adopting a relevant attitude (e.g., our seeing that *p* may make it rational for us to judge that *p*, our feeling pain may make it rational for us to judge that I feel pain), and hence it does make sense to speak of its being correct/incorrect. In short, experiences can be said to be correct/incorrect, but not rational/irrational. Thus, experiences can only be terminal or boundary points in chains of reasons. Whereas in the case of attitudes, it is not just that there is always a question as to what reasons there are for adopting them, but that their very identity

is based on their rational connections to other mental states. This is just what Davidson's idea of "rationality is constitutive of the mental" means to say: namely, that a particular attitude is individuated by its connections not only to those mental states it gives us reasons to enter into but also to those mental states which give us reasons to adopt it. In another word, what makes an attitude the very attitude it is is the role it plays in a rational network (its licensed pattern of behavior in the space of reasons). This is quite similar to the way we identify different pieces of chess (say, as a bishop, or as a knight): we identify a piece of chess as a knight not so much in terms of its intrinsic properties (its material make-up, its weight, or its shape), but in terms of the ways they are permitted to move in the chessboard.

However, one may still have a lot of questions about this anti-naturalist point of view. Why do experiences and attitudes all belong to the space of reasons and what do their places in it tell us about the roles they each play in our cognitive life? Also, what makes both sorts of mental states mental, how are we to account for the unity of mind (given that they are characterized by different features, say subjectivity and intentionality)? Let me begin with the cognitive roles of experiences and attitudes. Since experiences are contact points between the world (including the external world and our own body) and the cognitive agent, the cognitive role of experiences is to present to us for further judgment correct information about the world. Likewise, each sort of attitudes has a distinctive role to play: beliefs, which endorse that the world is in such a case, aim at truth, and desires, which target certain aspects of the world as goal states, aim at success--together they can guide our actions in making the world a better place to live. However, what is of great philosophical interest is why attitudes, in order to play their roles, have to be constituted by rationality, why they have to establish their identities in relation to other mental states which are rationally connected to them. This is not to call for an argument for the constitutive role of rationality, but to ask for a deeper understanding as to why we are required to see our minds in the way we do. The account I venture concerning the constitutive role of rationality will also touch upon the question concerning the unity of mind.

To be allowed both for more flexibility in individual action and for greater collaboration in collective action, humans are equipped with conceptual capacities (involving both abstraction and patterned reasoning), which enable us to represent the world with our own states of being. It is not only that we have to keep track of how we manage to represent the world with our own states of being, but also that others have to be able to keep track of it as well. So for the purpose of gaining more flexible control over our environment, what we need is not just any sort of representational states (any states causally correlated with a certain aspect of the world might suffice, the problem of misrepresentation aside), but a person's states of

being which not only correspond to specific aspects of the world but also their correspondence to the world are to be available both to the person herself and to others. To be allowed for greater social cooperation, humans are equipped with special capacities to represent the world in a very special way: they are capable of abstracting specific aspects of the world and putting them through reasoning in a patterned way, so that others can come to know what aspect of the world they are thinking of, provided that others also have similar abilities of abstraction and reasoning. It is in the nature of attitudes (beliefs/desires) that they be knowable by the agent herself as well as by others, and it is in virtue of a shared capacity of reasoning that others manage to keep track of how the agent's states of being come to represent specific aspects of the world. However, two different uses of the shared capacity of reasoning (in the first person use and in the third person use) account for different ways of knowing the same mind: while others have to discern some rational patterns from what the agent said and did in order to know the agent's attitudes, the agent only has to engage herself directly in reasoning (often in the deliberative form in which the agent asks herself, "what ought I to believe," "what ought I to feel") so as to put herself in an effortless readiness to answer questions about her own mind.

Thus, we now seem to have an answer to the question concerning the unity of mind: although experiences and attitudes are each characterized by a very different feature (subjectivity and intentionality), what makes both sorts of mental states mental is an immediate first-person access the agent has to each of them. Any other use of the term "mental" is then derivative, which can make sense only in relation to its primary use. Hence, a capacity (say, the functioning of which is unknown, and not knowable either, to the agent in some immediate way) is considered mental in so far as it can give rise to experiences or attitudes.

Now back to emotions. How do emotions fit into this anti-naturalist landscape of mind? Are emotions mental? If so, are they more like experiences or attitudes? From the expressions with which we describe our emotions (e.g., John fears that p, Kate hopes that q), we would say that emotions are apparently more like attitudes. That is, emotions, as a species of attitudes, are the agent's own states of being which correspond to specific aspects of the world ("have specific representational contents," so to speak), and are individuated by their rational connections to other mental states so as to ensure that their representational contents be graspable both by the agent herself and by others. However, this is only based on our observation from everyday expressions. To find emotions a proper place in the landscape of mind, we may have to go over several differences between experiences and attitudes:

- (1) In what way are emotions mental? Are they better characterized by a subjective character or by a special sort of directedness to the world (peculiar to conceptual

beings)?

- (2) What sort of place are emotions to occupy in the space of reasons? Are they to be restricted to the terminal points, or can they be rationally connected to many other mental states in both ways (serving both as reasons and as those which can be given reasons)?
- (3) What function do emotions play in our cognitive life? Is their function restricted to providing information which is waiting for further judgment? If not, is their role more like that of beliefs (depicting the world) or that of desires (targeting the world)?

As anti-naturalist, I am not open-minded about these questions. My intuition is that concepts of emotions are not theoretical or scientific concepts, but vernacular mental concepts with which we understand ourselves and communicate with others. What vernacular mental concepts pick out would not be any sort of states that are, in principle, inaccessible to the agent or hard-to-discern by others—if so, we would not be able to learn those concepts in our everyday life, and then these concepts would not be vernacular. More importantly, there must be some point of our coming to have the sort of vernacular mental concepts as we do now, that is, vernacular mental concepts, or folk psychology consisting of these concepts, must somehow serve some function in facilitating human living. It is my hunch (which I hope to give some support in this paper) that emotions, for conceptual beings like us, belong to the realm of rationality, just like other folk psychological states do, with each kind (cognitive, affective, conative) playing a distinctive role. It is a very deep part of our own self-conception as agents that our attitudes and actions are guided by reasons, that we have some rational control over our emotions, that we can somehow mature emotionally.

It comes as no surprise for me that our vernacular concepts of emotions do not pick up a unified group of mental states amenable for scientific study, i.e., emotion is not a natural kind (Griffiths, 2004). What I aim to do in this paper is not so much to find out what is common among different emotions (that is, to give sufficient and necessary conditions for emotion), or to describe what a typical emotion is. Rather, I shall try to illuminate the vernacular concept of emotion as we use in everyday life in hope of attaining a deeper understanding of what (we think) we are.

## II. Emotions as Eudaimonistic Evaluative Judgments

I shall introduce my version of judgment theory by answering several related questions. To begin with, what sorts of judgments are emotions? Judgments are mental actions that endorse certain representations of the world as true, while evaluative judgments are mental actions that appraise (positively or negatively)

certain representations of the world. All judgment theorists of emotions hold that emotions are a species of evaluative judgments, but they differ on what sorts of evaluative judgments emotions are. Solomon claims that emotions are, by nature, evaluative judgments made under some non-routine, urgent situations, so that emotions are essentially instrumental (serving short-term purpose) and inevitably hasty (Solomon 1980). In contrast, Nussbaum insists that emotions are judgments of values, or more precisely, they are “evaluative appraisals that ascribe high importance to things and people that lie outside the agent’s own sphere of control” (Nussbaum 2001). I agree with Solomon that emotions (as evaluative judgments) can be used as tools (in which case we should say that these emotions are irrational), but I disagree that emotions are essentially instrumental (rather, emotions are essentially constituted by their rational connections to other mental states). As to Nussbaum, I agree with her emphasis on the agent’s concern with the good life, but not so much with her insistence that the envisioned good life be constituted by things that are beyond our control (though this is often the case). This is yet a minor disagreement. What I disagree most is her attempt to extend the notion of intentionality in order to account for children’s or animals’ emotions. I accept McDowell’s idea that although children and animals have certain perceptual or affective sensitivities, what they have is different in kind from those of the conceptual/rational beings (McDowell 1994). Our conceptual/rational capacities drastically change the character of what we feel: in the case of emotions, they are not just passive feelings, but capable of responding to reasons, capable of being integrated into an intelligible conception the agent has of her own self.

On my view, emotions are a person’s evaluative judgments concerning her prospects of achieving the good life as she envisions for herself. More specifically, to love someone is to judge that the loved one is both capable and worthy of playing a very (if not the most) central role in her own cherished image of life. To fear something or some state of affairs is to judge that the existence of the thing or the obtaining of the state of affairs is threatening to (some part of) the envisioned good life. To be angry with a person is to judge that (some part of) the envisioned good life is damaged by the person’s doing something wrong. Emotions are not just evaluative judgments about some states of affairs being good or bad, but about their being good or bad *in terms of increasing or decreasing the agent’s own prospects of achieving the envisioned good life*. What underlies emotions is the agent’s implicit concern with living a good life.

Second, how do emotions differ from beliefs and desires? It is much easier to separate emotions from beliefs than from desires. Apparently, beliefs are not evaluative in the sense that they simply endorse certain representations as true but not

appraise them positively or negatively. In contrast, evaluative judgments are normative in the sense that they can provide reasons for actions. Thus, desires as a species of evaluative judgments are normative: the fact that some state of affairs is desirable (from the agent's point of view) gives the agent a reason to act in such a way as to bring about the desired state of affairs. Though emotions are evaluative, they are not directly normative in the way desires are: there are rational constraints upon desires that require them to be informed by what can be realistically attained, while we find no similar constraints for emotions. This has to do with the different roles desires and emotions are expected to play in the space of reasons: desires are under some realistic constraints so as to be more suitable to serve as an immediate source of motivation (to be closely tied to actions), while emotions are not under similar constraints so as to be more suitable to serve as outlets of personal aspirations. Thus, I accept Wollheim's idea that the function of emotions is to color the world (not so much to change the world), while the function of desires is to target the world (so as to bring about changes), that of beliefs is to represent the world (so as to attain truth).

Since we often analyze propositional attitudes in terms of several elements, their (propositional) contents, their psychological modes (belief, desire, fear, hope ...), and the direction of fit specific to each psychological mode, we can now explain the difference between beliefs, desires and emotions in this way. First, emotions as a species of attitudes have the same kind of representational content as beliefs and desires (the kind of representational content peculiar to conceptual beings). Second, emotions differ from beliefs and desires in their psychological modes, which are individuated by the specific roles they play in the space of reasons. Third, emotions differ from beliefs and desires in the direction of fit: in the case of beliefs, the direction is mind-to-world, in the case of desires, it is world-to-mind, but in the case of emotions, there is no direction of fit (for emotions are evaluative, but not directly action-guiding).

Furthermore, are emotions indispensable, or essential to living a reflective life? Why is there a need to color the world at all? As eudaimonistic evaluative judgments, emotions (if correct) aim to inform us what we deem most important in life personally speaking. And it should be noted that we can not get this sort of knowledge (i.e., knowledge of personal values or aspirations) other than undergoing various emotions. A rational agent without emotions (if possible) can come to know what impersonal values are (what is important from an impartial point of view)<sup>1</sup>, but would most likely lack an active engagement with the world because he is not capable of harboring any personal aspirations for happiness. Thus, it may be fair to say that

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<sup>1</sup> I wonder what it would take to deprive rational agents of their emotional capacity, what it would be like for rational agents not to be concerned with living a good life or being a certain kind of person.

emotions belong to what Plato calls the spiritual or aspirational part of the soul.

Finally, what are the constraints for assessing the correctness or rationality of emotions? Since emotions are eudaimonistic evaluative judgments, their correctness or rationality has to do with the correctness or rationality of the implicit conception of the good life. I would expect that authenticity (the implicit conception is truly one's own) and some degree of coherence be required. Perhaps, one might also add that each of the personal values (friendships, intimacy, ground projects, and so on) that make up a good life have to be grounded on impartial values. However, it simply goes beyond the scope of this paper to consider in details how we may go about evaluating the correctness or rationality of the agent's conception of the good life.

### III. Doing Justice to What we Feel

So far, I have been speaking of emotions as judgments. It should be noted that judgments are only occurrent forms of attitudes, and that emotions need not take occurrent forms. However, it is important to point out that when emotions do take occurrent forms, they would come to possess a lot of contingent characteristics (physical and mental), along with their essential characteristics. I suspect that many objections to the judgment theory (e.g., that the judgment theory can't take account of what we feel in emotions, or that it lost sight of the embodied nature of emotions) simply miss the target because they do not pay enough attention to the ontological status of emotions.

Attitudes (beliefs and desires), as a kind of persistent states or dispositions of a person, are mental not in virtue of their subjective or phenomenal character, but in virtue of their being attributable to the agent by the agent herself in some immediate way (allowing an immediate first-person access). Virtues or character traits of a person (e.g., generosity or courage) are also persistent states of a person, but they can not be self-attributed in an immediate way, for the agent, like others, has to observe the pattern of his own behavior to ascribe some character traits to himself, that is, he has no special access to his own states of character. Attitudes are like character traits in that they are persistent states of a person, which need not involve a distinctive phenomenology, but they are unlike character traits in that they are mental, they allow a special first-person access. Though attitudes need not involve a distinctive phenomenology, they may be manifested in judgments (their occurrent forms), and since judgments are mental actions (a species of events), taking place at specific spatial and temporal points, they would also have all sorts of contingent mental or physical characteristics (e.g., having some mental images or feelings, or undergoing some physiological changes) that go with their essential characteristics (i.e., the role they play in the space of reasons, their having a certain representational content).

With these preliminary clarifications in mind, I'd like to address the most common objection to the judgment theory, namely that it doesn't take into account the embodied nature of emotions. Some insist that feelings are essential to emotions (each sort of emotions is characterized by a distinctive sort of feelings), or at least, emotions can not be mere judgments. On my view, emotions in their occurrent forms are not just judgments, but have many contingent features that go with them. For instance, when my anger is taking an occurrent form, I will have feelings of bodily changes (my muscles are getting stiff, and my face is getting red). However, these feelings are not essential to emotions. First, we can be in a state of anger (in the dispositional form) without having any feelings at all. Secondly, even if some feelings are present, the feelings would not be feelings of anger if the person did not make a certain (negative) appraisal. What our vernacular concept of anger picks out is not a mere feeling, but a complex state of a person. Without the appropriate cognitive background, one simply can't feel angry. However, the judgment theorist is happy to accept that emotions in their occurrent forms are embodied, for judgments (as specific mental actions) do indeed takes place at specific spatial and temporal points, and hence have all sorts of contingent (mental and physical) features. On my view, emotions in their occurrent forms involve some feelings (though not necessarily of any distinctive sort), just as bodily actions (which are essentially mental) involve bodily movements, just as the activity of imagining (which are essentially mental as well) involve mental images. The fact that mental events are embodied does not make them any less mental. In the same vein, the fact that emotions are embodied does not automatically turn emotions into mere feelings, neither does this fact make emotions more than a species of evaluative judgment.

Relatedly, some might complain that the judgment theory makes emotions a matter of cool judgment, so that it can't account for the intensity we feel in emotions. Though emotions (as a species of evaluative judgments) are characterized by their rational connections to other mental states (their role in the space of reasons), this doesn't mean that emotions in their occurrent forms can't carry heat. On the contrary, since what is at stake is the envisioned good life, emotions in their occurrent forms are most likely to be accompanied by notable physiological disturbances and feelings of intensity and urgency.

Furthermore, some would object that since the judgment theory make emotions a matter of activity or choice, it can't account for the fact that we often feel overwhelmed, having no control over what happens to us at emotional moments. In response, I shall point out that judgments are mental actions, which are, in nature, done for reasons. And in cases where reasons are compelling (e.g., it is for sure that one has failed in one's ground project), there is no room for the agent to judge

otherwise than to appraise negatively that one's envisioned good life is seriously damaged by one's failure in the ground project, that is, the agent is compelled by reason to feel disappointed. In cases like this, the agent would then have a feeling of passivity, for he is compelled by reasons to make a certain sort of evaluative judgment (i.e., to enter into a state of disappointment). It is very much like the cases where we are compelled by logic to accept a certain conclusion, provided that we've already accepted some premises. We don't need to appeal to the feeling theory to account for the feeling of passivity in emotions.

Still, some might think that a judgment theory, which sees emotions as persistent states of a person, can not account for the transient character of emotions. It is suggested that emotions come and go in the way feelings do, so that we'd better accept a feeling theory. In response, I would say that like feelings, judgments can change too, and change easily as well, so long as there are changes in reasons. In particular, emotions as eudaimonistic evaluative judgments would change as our conception of the good life changes (which could take place, but not often), and they would also change as our estimate of the role of some particular person or event in our life changes (which happens quite often). Thus, seeing emotions as attitudes doesn't make emotions any less transient than they in fact are.

At last, I shall consider the most crucial objection to the judgment theory concerning belief-independence of emotions. The main idea is this: since emotions are belief-independent, they can only be feelings or responses (mental events happening to us), but not attitudes (mental events over which we have control). Are emotions belief-independent? Peacocke draws an analogy between emotion and perception (Peacocke 2004). In the case of perception, when we saw a violin in the wall but later found out that it was only a painting, our perceptual experience would not change accordingly. That is, our perceptual experience could not be corrected by beliefs: we still see a violin there even though we no longer believe there is one. Similarly, it is said that our fear of flying would not go away even if we no longer believe that flying is dangerous, so emotions are as resistant to correction by beliefs as perceptions. Thus, Peacocke insists that emotions are not attitudes (perhaps, they are not even in the space of reasons, for emotions, unlike perceptions, can't offer reasons for further judgments), but that they are simply passive responses to evaluative judgments, telling us nothing new about the world.

In response, I shall say that emotions are indeed belief-independent in some cases (these are just cases of irrational emotions), but they are not essentially so. When the agent is still under the influence of fear while seeing no reason to feel fearful at all, the agent would fail to understand what exactly she is afraid of. She might begin to wonder that it is not flying that she is afraid of, but something related

to flying that is the true object of her fear. Just as in the case of phobia, the Little Hans's fear of horses is not really a fear of horses, but a fear of some other horse-like object (which is equally giant in size, equally threatening), which may very well be a fear of his own father. In so far as emotions are not responsive to reasons, they are simply irrational: often, these are cases where the agent has some reason to feel fearful, but the reason is not sufficient or somewhat defective. However, to the extent to which there is no intelligibility at all about the agent's feeling fearful or guilty (there is no reason whatsoever for the agent to feel that way), it does not even make sense to speak of her having any emotion at all.

The objections I address here come from the feeling theory. There are other kinds of cognitive theories which disagree with the judgment theory: for instance, Jerome Neu sees emotions as thoughts, which the agent has not accepted or rejected as true, so are not judgments yet (Neu 1980), and de Sousa sees emotions as perceptual gestalts, which mark out what is salient for us in a situation, redirect our attention, and set the stage for inference and inquiry (de Sousa 1980). However, I think that a proper account of judgment can easily incorporate the insights of these cognitive theories. As we have seen, judgments can give reasons to other mental states (such as imagining, questioning, doubting, suspecting) and also have many contingent features (mental images, feelings, bodily changes). So, what Neu calls "jealous thoughts" actually include various features of a jealous attitude or judgment: either non-judgmental activities that manifest a jealous attitude (e.g., imagining, doubting, questioning), or mental images that contingently accompany a jealous judgment or other related non-judgmental activities. As to de Sousa's perception theory, I think that the judgment theory can easily make emotions (especially emotions in its dispositional forms, emotions as implicit attitudes) responsible for various perceptual effects, and that there is no need to turn emotions into some theoretical states in the sub-personal level (for this would fail to do justice to our everyday notion of emotions), and hence no need to posit a special kind of content for emotions.

#### IV. Emotions and Intentional Psychology

Emotions are states of intentional psychology, which are individuated by their places in the space of reasons. However, this intentional (rational) system is not causally closed, rather it is subject to all kinds of causal influence, which explains why irrationality is not uncommon. It is not just emotions that are subject to causal influence. Rather, other sorts of attitudes like beliefs can also be irrational, e.g., one's coming to have the belief that *p* simply because of one's wish that *p* (wishful thinking), or the belief that *p* simply because of one's being anxious that not *p* (mental

tropism). However, emotions are perhaps more subject to non-rational causal forces (e.g., physiological disturbance, chemical imbalance, mental tropism, defense mechanism) than beliefs and desires. This may have to do with the gravity of their subject matter: when one's envisioned good life is at stake, it is hard to remain calm and ready to accept failure.

Since the intentional system is not causally closed, we have to go beyond intentional psychology in order to give a complete explanation of human behavior. In addition to intentional psychology (which we pick up as we come to learn our first language), we also need to know how all sorts of causal influence work upon our minds, how they affect our capacity to think and act rationally—this is where we need psychoanalysis, and sciences of various sorts. Nevertheless, what is central to our being human is the capacity to think and act rationally, to change ourselves according to what reasons prescribe. What instincts can't do for us, we do with our own rationality. And when nature is not there to watch for our happiness, we do with our emotions. To give human rationality a proper place, we may have to re-enchant nature. It may be fair to say then, emotion is, after all, an organ of happiness.

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