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ARTICLE

Are Kantian Emotions Feelings?

Uri Eran

Technion – Israel Institute of Technology
Email: urieran82@gmail.com

Abstract

According to Alix Cohen, Kant defines emotions as 'feelings'. Although I find her account of Kantian feelings compelling, I provide three reasons to doubt that it is an account of emotions: (1) it is unclear *why* Cohen identifies emotions with Kantian feelings; (2) some Kantian feelings are not emotions; (3) some Kantian desires may be emotions. I propose, however, that with some qualifications Cohen's account may be upheld, provided its extra-textual assumptions about emotions are explicated. Against her claim that Kantian feelings have a derived intentionality, I argue that the text is compatible with their being intrinsically intentional.

Keywords: feelings; emotions; pleasure; desire; moral psychology; Alix Cohen

1. Introduction

In 'A Kantian Account of Emotions as Feelings' (Cohen 2020; hereafter, KA)[1] Alix Cohen aims 'to extract from Kant's various writings an account of the nature of the emotions and their function – and to do so despite the fact that Kant himself neither uses the term "emotion" nor offers a systematic treatment of it' (KA, p. 429). She argues that 'By contrast with assimilative models that view emotions either as a species of belief or judgment, or as a species of desire, or as a combination of both ... Kant puts forward a model of the emotions that defines them first and foremost as "feelings", which are a third, irreducible kind of mental state' (p. 430). Although I find much in her account of Kantian *feelings* compelling and innovative, I think it remains doubtful that it is an account of *emotions*. In what follows I elaborate on this worry, and propose that Cohen's account may nevertheless be upheld, if taken to provide the necessary but insufficient conditions on a Kantian mental state's being an emotion, and if its extra-textual assumptions about emotions are made explicit. I then challenge Cohen's claim that Kantian feelings have a derived intentionality.

2. Which Kantian states are emotions?

Before I present the reasons for doubting that Cohen's account is an account of emotions, I want to point out that it is not immediately clear which mental states in Kant Cohen takes to be emotions: all and only the mental states Kant associates with the faculty of feeling, or all those associated with the faculty of feeling and some of those

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associated with the faculty of desire? The following passage might be taken to suggest that her view is the latter:

> In taking emotions to constitute a class of mental states unified by the fact that they are feelings, the interpretation put forward in this paper goes against the recent trend in Kant scholarship that takes the apparent diversity of affective states at face value, emphasizing that what we now call 'emotion' includes the numerous, distinct states that Kant calls 'feeling', 'affect', 'passion', 'inclination', 'desire', and even 'instinct'. Instead of looking for a single account of the phenomena that we call 'emotions', these commentators settle for a mixed model. Yet the problem with this model is that it overlooks the fact that there is something common and unique to emotions, and thereby fails to recognise what makes these states 'emotions'. In contrast, my aim is to identify what they all share intrinsically. As I will argue, what unifies them in spite of their apparent heterogeneity is the fact that they are essentially 'feelings'. (KA, pp. 432–3)

Prima facie, 'the phenomena that we call "emotions"' refers to the list of Kant's terms 'feeling', 'affect', etc. (call these 'Kant's affective terms'). This list includes two terms which Kant associates with the faculty of feeling ('feeling' and 'affect': *MM*, 6: 407, *Anth*, 7: 235), and four which he associates with the faculty of desire ('inclination', 'passion', 'desire' and 'instinct': *Anth*, 7: 265). On this reading, Cohen is saying that we call 'emotions' some affective terms Kant associates with the faculty of feeling and some which he associates with the faculty of desire. But Cohen also says she will argue that what unifies 'them' – presumably, the affective states designated by Kant's affective terms – is that they are essentially 'feelings'. While it is fairly obvious that feeling and affect – which is a kind of feeling (7: 235) – are essentially feelings, it is doubtful that the mental states Kant associates with the faculty of desire are feelings.[2] Moreover, Cohen provides no evidence that mental states of the faculty of desire are essentially feelings, and her table of feelings (KA, p. 442) does not mention mental states of the faculty of desire as feelings. This suggests that Cohen *does not* think that mental states of the faculty of desire are feelings. She therefore cannot be saying that we call the phenomena designated by Kant's affective terms 'emotions'. So, despite appearances to the contrary, 'the phenomena that we call "emotions"' does not refer to Kant's affective terms.

What does 'the phenomena that we call "emotions"' refer to, then? On an alternative reading, it refers to the set of phenomena that we – presumably, ordinary English speakers or philosophers – call 'emotions'. Cohen then says she will argue that what unifies these phenomena is that they are feelings; and since she does not argue that emotions are feelings independently of Kant, I take this to mean that what we call 'emotions' are 'feelings' in Kant.

Although this does not preclude mental states of the faculty of desire from being emotions, for the aforementioned reasons I think Cohen does not take these mental states to be feelings and so they are not emotions, on her view. In fact, some of the things Cohen says suggest that *all and only* mental states of the faculty of feeling in Kant are emotions. She says, for example, that emotions 'originate not from the cognitive faculty or the conative faculty, but from the "faculty of the feeling of pleasure

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and displeasure'" (KA, p. 430). Assuming that mental states that originate from the conative faculty are those Kant associates with the faculty of desire (inclination, passion, etc.), Cohen is denying here that they are emotions; and assuming that the mental states that originate from the faculty of feeling are those Kant associates with the faculty of feeling ('feeling' and 'affect'), she is saying that emotions are the mental states Kant associates with the faculty of feeling. Moreover, Cohen says that on her reading, '"emotion" is co-extensive with "feeling"' (p. 433, n. 14). This strongly suggests that *all and only feelings* in Kant are emotions (indeed, her table of feelings includes *all* kinds of Kantian feelings: feelings of the agreeable, and aesthetic and intellectual feelings). I therefore take Cohen's view to be that *what we call 'emotions' refers to all and only the mental states Kant associates with the faculty of feeling* (not to those associated with the faculty of desire).

3. Are all and only feelings emotions?

I see three reasons to doubt that what we call 'emotions' refers to all and only mental states Kant associates with the faculty of feeling. First, it is unclear how Cohen justifies this claim. As noted earlier, Kant does not use the term 'emotion' (or an obvious German equivalent), and so identifying emotions with some set of mental states in Kant that go by a different name requires justification. However, I do not see where Cohen says why emotions are to be identified with mental states of the faculty of feeling, and not with some other set of mental states in Kant.

In §2, Cohen spells out the distinction between feeling and desire in Kant, and argues that, 'insofar as emotions are feelings, not desires, their essential function is not motivational' (KA, p. 430); §3 argues that feelings in Kant are non-cognitive states that have a form of 'derived-intentionality', and §4 argues that they function as affective appraisals of the state of our agency; in §5, Cohen shows that this function is necessary for the orientational activity of the mind, and in §6, she discusses two Kantian feelings to support her interpretation. However, none of this seems to answer the question 'why are feelings (and not some other set of mental states) in Kant emotions?'

§§3–6 make interpretative claims about feelings in Kant – not about the relation between Kantian feelings and emotions. §2 looks like a good candidate for establishing the identity of Kantian feelings and emotions, but in fact it provides no argument for such identification and remains non-committed on whether they are identical, arguing merely that it is 'insofar' as emotions are feelings that their essential function is not motivational. I take this to mean that '*if what we call "emotions" refers to "feelings" in Kant*, then the essential function of what we call "emotions" is not motivational, according to Kant'. If this is correct, then Cohen is not arguing that what we call 'emotions' are feelings in Kant; she is rather making a weaker hypothetical claim. And that Cohen is not arguing in this section that what we call 'emotions' are feelings in Kant gains further support from the fact that she concludes this section by saying that she has defended the claim that 'the essential function of feeling is not motivational' (KA, p. 433). From this, however, it does not follow that what we call 'emotions' are feelings in Kant.

It might be thought that there is *no need* to justify the claim that feelings in Kant are emotions because some of the mental states which Kant associates with the

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faculty of feeling are considered emotions in ordinary English. For instance, joy and sadness are affects, and are associated with the faculty of feeling (*Anth*, 7: 254, *LA*, 25: 589). But although this suggests that *some* mental states of the faculty of feeling are emotions, it does not warrant Cohen's strong identification of emotions with Kantian feelings, such that *all and only* these mental states are emotions.

Although I do not see an explicit justification for identifying emotions with Kantian feelings in KA, I want to consider two possible justifications that might be thought implicit in it. First, it might be thought that Cohen argues as follows: emotions, according to some, are feelings; so we can reconstruct Kant's theory of emotion on the basis of what he says about feelings. This argument turns on an equivocation of 'feeling', however. For from the fact that emotions are feelings in *some sense*, it does not follow that they are feelings in Kant's sense. To see why, suppose that emotions are feelings in James' sense (1884), i.e., perceptions of bodily changes. If this is correct, then Cohen should not have reconstructed Kant's theory of emotion on the basis of what Kant says about feelings; for on Cohen's view, Kantian feelings are *not* perceptions of bodily changes. Rather, if James is right, Cohen should have reconstructed Kant's theory of emotion on the basis of what Kant says about perceptions of bodily changes. So, the assumption that emotions are feelings in some indeterminate sense would not warrant reconstructing Kant's theory of emotion on the basis of what he says about feelings.

Alternatively, it might be thought that Cohen's argument is this: (1) emotions form a natural kind; (2) according to Kant, we have three mental faculties, such that our mental states are of three natural kinds: those of the cognitive faculty, of the faculty of desire and of the faculty of feeling; (3) mental states of the cognitive faculty are not emotions because emotions are not cognitions; (4) mental states of the faculty of desire are not emotions because the essential function of emotions is not motivational; (5) some mental states in Kant must be emotions, So (by elimination), (6) only the mental states of the faculty of feeling in Kant are emotions.

This argument relies on two contested assumptions: (1) is denied by those who argue that folk categories of emotion do not designate natural kinds (e.g. Rorty 2004); (4) is denied by those who identify emotions with motivational states or causes of such states (e.g. Deonna and Teroni 2015, Scarantino 2014). Given that Kant has no obvious equivalent of 'emotion', and that theorists disagree not only about the nature of emotions but also on whether they have a common nature, reconstructing Kant's theory requires appealing to contested extra-textual assumptions about emotions or emotional terms. But Cohen seems to take (1) for granted, saying that it is a *fact* that there is something common and unique to emotions (KA, p. 432); and since both (1) and (4) are based on *philosophical* rather than textual considerations, they should be made explicit so that it is clear that Cohen's identification of Kantian feelings with emotions depends on a certain conception of emotions that is not necessarily Kant's. And even if sound, this argument establishes that only mental states of the faculty of feeling are emotions – not that *all* these mental states are emotions.

Moreover, if we appeal to extra-textual assumptions about emotions, there is reason to think that some mental states of the faculty of feeling in Kant *are not* emotions. For on Kant's view, some of the mental states which originate in the faculty of feeling are sensuous pleasures and displeasures through sense (*Anth*, 7: 230). These mental states, called 'enjoyment' (*Vergnügen*) and 'pain' (*Schmerz*) in the agreeable and the

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disagreeable, include pleasure in wine (*CPJ*, 5: 212), laughter (*Anth*, 7: 262) and pain from a needle prick (to borrow Frierson's example, 2014: 168). These mental states are probably too primitive to qualify as emotions in any contemporary sense of the term, and so Cohen's account is inaccurate insofar as it treats them as emotions.

Finally, there is reason to think that some of the mental states of the faculty of desire in Kant *are* emotions, and if they are, Cohen's account unjustly excludes them.[3] Some passions, for instance, are normally treated by commentators as emotions (e.g. Frierson 2014: 168, Deimling 2014: 108), and this practice seems warranted, given that 'passion' is a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy term that is fairly close to 'emotion'. Moreover, in some passages, Kant's view appears to be that desires *are* feelings, pleasures or satisfactions of a certain kind. For instance, he is recorded saying that desire is 'a feeling in regard to what is future' (*LA*, 25: 795) and 'satisfaction [*Wohlgefallen;* translation revised] in the existence of the object' (25: 1334); he characterizes desire and willing as satisfaction with respect to the actuality of the object (*LM*, 29: 1013, *CPJ*, 5: 209); and says that desire is a pleasure that is a ground of an activity (*LM*, 28: 254). These passages characterize desire as a kind of feeling, satisfaction or pleasure, which suggests that if the mental states of the faculty of feeling are emotions, then so are those of the faculty of desire.

These considerations are not meant to establish that Cohen's account should be rejected, but rather that its acceptance requires some qualification and explication of its extra-textual assumptions about emotions. Assuming that she relies on something like my second suggested justification for identifying emotions with Kantian feelings, her account remains a viable option if we accept that 'emotions' designates a natural kind and that emotions are not essentially motivational. And if not *all* feelings in Kant are emotions, Cohen's account should be regarded as providing the necessary yet insufficient conditions on a mental state's being a Kantian emotion.

Alternatively, we could reject the assumption that what we call 'emotions' designates a set of Kantian mental states that form a natural kind. This would allow us to endorse the reasonable and generally accepted assumption that what we call 'emotions' refers to mental states of the faculty of feeling *and* the faculty of desire. We could then reconstruct Kant's theory on the basis of what he says of these two kinds of mental states. However, this account would also provide necessary but insufficient conditions on a Kantian mental state's being an emotion, for not all the mental states of these two faculties are emotions (as commonly understood). Whatever solution we favour, any extra-textual assumptions about emotions must be explicit, so that it is clear where we are relying on Kant, and where on our own understanding of emotions.

4. Why feelings may be intrinsically intentional

The other aspect of Cohen's account I wish to examine is her claim that Kantian feelings 'have a form of "derived-intentionality" that stems from their relationship with judgment' (KA, p. 430). Cohen presents this original contribution to the ongoing debate on the intentionality of Kantian feelings as a middle-ground position between Guyer's (1997) non-intentionalist and Allison's (1998) intentionalist reading, arguing that although they are not intentional in and of themselves (they have no intrinsic intentionality), Kantian feelings nonetheless have a 'derived' or 'derivative'

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intentionality (p. 436). In a footnote, she refers to Byrne's (2006) definition of derivative intentionality: 'A thing has derivative intentionality just in case the fact that it represents such-and-such can be explained in terms of the intentionality of something else' (p. 436, n. 24). Accordingly, I take Cohen's claim that Kantian feelings have derived intentionality to mean that the fact that they represent can be explained in terms of the intentionality of something else (namely, of reflective judgements).

Although some of the things Cohen says suggest that *all* feelings represent in the sense that they are all reflected upon in judgements, I believe her considered view is that some feelings do not represent because they are not objects of reflective judgement. That Cohen thinks that all feelings are accompanied by reflective judgement and so are all intentional is suggested when she says that 'the relationship between judgment and feeling is accounted for by the fact that the power of judgment is transcendentally necessary to account for the possibility of feeling as the faculty that enables the mind to be affectively aware of its own state' (KA, p. 439). The claim that the power of judgement is *transcendentally* necessary to account for the possibility of feeling suggests that we cannot feel without making a reflective judgement. But Cohen makes clear that feelings *can* come apart from reflective judgement when she says that, on the view she attributes to Kant, I can feel jealous without knowing that I feel jealous: 'In this case, I am aware of a feeling of pain through its phenomenological character, but unless I reflect on it, I cannot identify its meaning' (p. 438, n. 32). I therefore take her view to be that some feelings are not objects of reflective judgements and so are not about anything – they must await reflective judgements to gain their objects.

In contrast, I think there is good evidence that Kantian feelings are intrinsically intentional, such that they represent independently of any judgement we might make about them. Kant says, for instance, that 'Pleasure is the *representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life*' (*CPrR*, 5: 9n.); that pleasure is 'the representation of the agreement of an object with the productive power of the soul' (*LM*, 29: 894); and that it is 'the consciousness of the agreement of an object with the productive power of imagination of our soul' (29: 891). These passages speak of pleasure as a representation or consciousness *of* something, and nothing in them suggests that pleasure represents or makes us conscious of something by means of reflective judgement. Assuming that what Kant says holds for both pleasure and displeasure, and that all feelings are of these two kinds (*Anth*, 7: 230), these passages suggest that all feelings are intrinsically intentional.

Considerations of space do not allow me to properly defend the claim that Kantian feelings are intrinsically intentional. I do want to point out, however, that the fact that they have no *objective reference* does not preclude feelings from having *intrinsic intentionality*. Cohen seems to be motivated by this worry when she says she is sympathetic with Guyer's view that 'it is hard to see how feelings can have intentionality in and of themselves', and adds that 'insofar as in feeling "nothing at all in the object is designated" (CJ 89 [*CPJ*, 5: 203]), it is not clear how feelings can refer to objects' (KA, p. 435). I believe this worry is based on an unnecessarily strong reading of Kant's claim that in feeling nothing at all in the object is designated. On this reading, feelings have no intentional object or determinate content. On a weaker reading, however, Kant might be saying only that feelings are not about objective properties we perceive with our senses; and this does not preclude them from being about something else. This

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weaker reading has the advantage that it is compatible with the aforementioned passages which suggest that pleasures represent something. Although I cannot make good on this claim here, I propose that feelings are about a relation between an object and a *particular* subject, which prevents them from contributing to objective cognition. Accordingly, although they do not represent objective properties, feelings are nevertheless about something, independently of any judgements we might make about them.[4]

4. Conclusion

If what I have argued is correct, there are three reasons to doubt that Cohen's account of Kantian feelings is an account of Kantian emotions: (1) it is unclear why she thinks all and only Kantian feelings are emotions; (2) some Kantian feelings are not emotions, in any contemporary sense of the term; (3) some Kantian desires probably are emotions. On my proposed justification of Cohen's account, it can be upheld if we accept the assumptions that emotions form a natural kind and that they are not essentially motivational; it should be understood, however, as providing the necessary but insufficient conditions on a Kantian mental state's being an emotion. I have also proposed that if Kant's remarks on the subjective nature of feelings are read as denying that they are about objective properties, Kantian feelings may be intrinsically intentional, as some passages suggest.

Notes

1 Although she says that some of her interpretation is 'programmatic' (KA, p. 452), I take it that in calling her account 'Kantian' Cohen means that it accurately captures what Kant had written and taught. I will be using 'Kantian' in the same way. Kant's works are cited by volume and page of the Akademieausgabe (Kant 1900–). Quotations are from the Cambridge Edition. German words in brackets do not appear in the Cambridge Edition. I use the following abbreviations: *Anth* = *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Kant 2007); *CPJ* = *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Kant 2002); *CPrR* = *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant 1996); *LA* = *Lectures on Anthropology* (Kant 2012); *LM* = *Lectures on Metaphysics* (Kant 1997); *MM* = *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 1996).

2 Although I say it is doubtful that the mental states of the faculty of desire are feelings, I will argue below that there is some evidence to support this claim. Cohen, however, does not mention this evidence.

3 The first two reasons for doubting that Cohen's is an account of emotions hold independently of whether her view is (a) all and only mental states of the faculty of feeling are emotions, or (b) all these mental states and some mental states of the faculty of desire are emotions. The third reason holds only if her view is (a).

4 It might be objected that, for Kant, intentionality requires concepts or objective reference, and so feelings cannot be intentional because they lack objective reference and are non-conceptual. Although I cannot defend this claim here, my view is that for Kant it is *cognition* – not intentionality – that requires concepts and implies objective reference.

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