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Short Assignment 2

PHIL2054, Emotion in the Arts

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Solomon’s theory of emotion tells us that an emotion is an evaluative judgment, which is different than an ordinary judgment. An ordinary judgment is an assertion of a proposition. For example, I can judge that the chair is hard, or that my sweater is red. An evaluative judgment, however, is the assertion of a proposition with evaluative content. Solomon thinks that these judgments are emotions. Solomon’s primary argument in favor of emotions being evaluative judgments is a list of similarities between emotions and judgments. A change in a judgment causes a change in the relevant emotion. For example, I make a judgment that I have been offended, and therefore I am angry. If I later redefine my judgment, and decide that I was not actually offended, I will no longer be angry. Solomon’s other good argument for his theory is in reaction to an objection to his theory. This objection is that we can make a judgment without feeling the corresponding emotion. I can judge that I have been offended without becoming angry. Solomon counters this objection by stating that an emotion is actually a system of judgments. This means that an emotion is a result of many judgments that we make simultaneously. In the previous example, if I judged that I was offended, but did not become angry, it is because I must have also made another judgment simultaneously, such as judging that the offender actually meant no offense. Based on his systematic argument, Solomon attempts to make his argument airtight to exceptions by saying that in questionable cases, there is another judgment being made that we have not yet considered.

James argues that when we perceive something, our body reacts with certain changes, and feeling these changes is the emotion we recognize. This contrasts with Solomon’s view, where we would experience an emotion (by making a judgment) and then react. James’ primary argument is a three-part argument. First, he states that emotions are a subset of instincts. Emotions are one of the instincts included in humans. The next part of James argument is that bodily changes are felt immediately as they occur. Lastly, James uses a thought experiment to argue that if one were to remove all the bodily feelings from an emotion, nothing would remain. James second most convincing argument is also a counter to an objection. The objection is that we fear some things, such as losing all our money in a stock market crash, that are not instinctive. James counters this objection by noting that there are still similar bodily reactions. A person needs to learn to fear a stock-market crash, but once they understand the potential dangers, their body reacts similarly. One may feel a drop in his stomach at the fear of a stock market crash just as he feels a drop in his stomach for instinctive fear, such as when standing near a precipice. This argument is convincing because it closes many exceptional cases to James theory in a rational manner.

Overall, Solomon seems to have the better argument. James’ thought experiment is not verifiable, and it seems that we could disagree on the basis of simply having a different opinion and there would be no counter available to James. James is smart to chain this argument with two other much more reasonable arguments, but the jump is still too extreme. Solomon, on the other hand, seems to create an airtight argument by making emotions into systems of judgments. Whenever there is an exceptional case to Solomon’s argument (in particular, different emotions being the result of the same judgments), Solomon need only point out what makes the exceptional situation different from the normal situation. This difference is then the judgment that differentiates the result from the normal case.