

**Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve (Eds.),
collective emotions: perspectives from psychology,
philosophy, and sociology**

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Located though it is within a body, an environmental niche, and in some cases, a social context, it is the brain that is the primary realiser of all mental states. We accordingly think that only the individual bearers of these brains can have emotions. Of course, some of these emotions are directed at the individual's social concerns. It is also common for individuals to influence each other's emotions, sometimes in a very rapid and reciprocal manner. But it is commonly presumed that this is as far as we need to go to explain all instances of emotion.

On the other hand, there are a range of social phenomena that encourage us to look at things rather differently. As the authors of this volume variously observe, protest movements, religious rituals, joint musical performances, large sporting events, mass celebrations and intractable decades-long conflicts display emotional characteristics that are hard to reduce to the individuals involved. Moreover, participants may well report a sense of being carried away by the mood of the occasion, or the 'emotional atmosphere'. Perhaps the best way to make sense of these phenomena is to allow for 'collective emotions'. And if one is willing to admit collective emotions in such large scale cases, one may well return to ordinary interpersonal interactions with a different perspective, recognizing that some of these, too, may qualify as cases of collective emotion. After all, the small group is often capable of more intensive forms of interaction than large scale social movements.

Certainly all parties seem to agree that it would not do justice to these phenomena to simply aggregate the set of individual emotions, or even to add the condition that they all focus on the same target. Humans are susceptible to too many individual differences for a common focus to account for the observed patterns of behavioural

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synchronization or spreading activation within a group, the endurance of attitudes, reports of emotional atmospheres, or the powerful impact upon individuals after the event. Stronger kinds of alignment between individuals must be involved. But this still leaves us with options. As John Protevi observes in his chapter, a key distinction remains between, on the one hand, an emergent emotional phenomenon that must primarily be described at the group level, and on the other hand, the coordination of individual emotions by various means.

In this volume both sorts of view are defended. Indeed, the editors have done a fine job in collecting together as many relevant perspectives on collective emotions as one could have wished for. As far as I can tell, most of the key figures working in this area have contributed. Given this diversity, it would have been greatly appreciated if the editors had done more to provide a clear and systematic presentation of the options available, and the arguments for potentially preferring one option over another. As it is, some distinctive options are outlined in the four philosophical chapters occupying the first section of the book. But it is not so clear how these chapters connect with the rest of the volume. Referencing between the philosophers and non-philosophers is rare (Krueger ch.11 is one exception) and the psychologists and sociologists tend to adopt more modest views of collective emotions than the philosophers. In this review, I will accordingly try to extract from the volume the key theoretical options for collective emotions, as well as the different factors that are proposed for their generation. For each of the three main models that I describe I will offer a few sceptical considerations. But note that this is with a view towards clarifying the major lines of debate rather than any lack of sympathy for the overall project. Indeed it seems possible to me that there could be occasions upon which all the models I describe are in operation simultaneously, but whether this ever counts as a single token emotional experience had by a group is doubtful.

1 Group commitment emotions

The first type of model that we can discern in the volume is I think best characterised by the claim that there are emotional norms that exist at the group level. Individual members of groups defer, or commit to these norms when having certain emotions. The clearest case is described by Gilbert (ch.2) who aims to make sense of statements such as, ‘the team is so excited’ or, ‘our family feels terrible about what happened’. Her claim is that in these cases we jointly commit ‘as a body’ to an emotional state. What this comes to is that we all take on the obligation to endorse, or express a certain emotion as representing the attitude of our group. An important feature of Gilbert’s account is the intelligibility of committing to the group’s declared emotion, while simultaneously taking myself on an individual basis to have a different emotion. For instance, I might privately regard my own actions to have been honourable, while deploring the actions of my group and taking myself as a group member to share in that responsibility. However, the typical case is to commit, as far as one is able, to feel an emotion on behalf of the group.

The group-level aspects of Gilbert’s model of collective emotions derive significantly from the theory of collective intentionality that she and others have developed since the 1980s. I was disappointed to note that this theory is not systematically outlined and

defended in the volume, as it is not uncontroversial, and is potentially a key support for claims about collective emotions. Very briefly, the argument is that certain intentions to act must primarily be attributed to groups, and not the individuals who actually act on those intentions. The reason for thinking these intentions exist at the group level is that no individual is *capable* of intending certain group actions. Only the group as a whole has that power or authority. However, we might alternatively say that there is a set of individual intentions to play one's part in a group action. It is therefore a matter of argument whether the group-level description has priority over the set-of-parts-level description. In favour of group-level priority, an analogy might be made with individual intentions where sub-intentions to carry out some part of a complex act derive their purpose from the overarching intention. Similarly, it may only make sense to intend to play the oboe part in the symphony given the prior existence of the group-level intention to play the symphony.

If we allow that groups can have intentions, we might also allow that groups can have emotions if they correspond to a similar pattern of joint commitment. This may be the best way to capture the nature of our obligations when statements of group emotionality are made. However, the main worry that we are likely to have about this claim is that emotions are phenomenal states of conscious, and moreover ones in which inner bodily feelings play an important role. It is less plausible to say that such conscious qualities exist at the group level than the abstract representational content of intentions. Gilbert is of course aware of this worry, and allows that we can either retain the advantage her account has in making sense of certain everyday ways of talking and acting, or retain the demand that all emotions must be conscious.

Alongside Gilbert's view of collective emotions, Helm (ch.4) takes a view which I think qualifies as a version of the group commitment model. His view is distinct in crucial respects from Gilbert's model in that there is no claim about the existence of a singular emotion to which we all commit. Second, individuals take themselves to be having an emotion on their own behalf rather than on behalf of the group. However, what is similar to Gilbert's model is the commitment to a norm that exists at the group level, and which determines what individuals feel. The norm in this case is an emotional focus or concern for the integrity of the community. As I understand it, this focus qualifies as a norm because it specifies which emotions we may rationally have in conformity with caring about the community. Key examples include moral emotions such as outrage about some criminal act that doesn't affect one directly. Moreover, Helm claims that us all having such emotions contributes constitutively to a pattern of social coordination that is simultaneously identified as *our* reverence or respect for the community. So although I might not be having an emotion on behalf of the community, my emotion contributes to a joint commitment to the import of the community.

Along the same lines as Helm's model are, I think, the contributions by Knoblauch & Herbrich (ch.24) and Kivran-Swaine & Naaman (ch.28). This is because they identify *norms for feeling* in, respectively, religious communities and gender categories. Again, it may not be suggested that in these cases individuals feel emotions on behalf of a social group, but it may be reasonable to argue that their emotion-determining norms are primarily realised at the group level. Another set of views that may conform to either Helm's or Gilbert's models are those

outlining the ‘intergroup emotion’ model (de Rivera (ch.15); Ray, Mackie & Smith (ch.16); Ferguson & Brandscombe (ch. 17); Halperin (ch.19)). The intergroup emotion model looks at emotions that we have as a result of committing to a certain group membership, for instance, one’s self-categorisation as an American or a Jew. Intergroup theorists do not seem to defend the existence of group-level entities. However, it may well be fair to say that the individual has an emotion on behalf of the group since they are experiencing say, anger at the 9–11 attacks, *as* an American. As such, I think theorists of intergroup emotion would do well to closely examine Gilbert’s and Helm’s models and determine to what extent they can make use of the conceptual schemes outlined by these philosophers.

2 Coordinated individual emotions

The second type of model that I identify in the volume is by far the most popular. It is the claim that individuals can mutually entrain their emotions, falling into similar and synchronized emotional states that are often experienced by the participants as being ‘shared’. We may discern five general factors for the generation of these emotions, drawn from various sources in the volume (the contributions of Kelly, Iannone & McCarty (ch.12) and Knotterus (ch.21) also usefully survey a number of factors). These are: **i**) Joint attention, that is, mutual awareness of each other attending to a shared scenario or task. This is a key factor for shifting mere aggregates of similar individual emotions towards something more definitely collective in nature (see in particular Brosch ch.6 on this). Given this, both **ii**) low-level entrainment factors- basically behavioural mimicry (see in particular chapters 5, 7, 8, 11, 21) and **iii**) inferred signals about the attitudes or emotions of others (see in particular chapter 10), are the most immediate means towards coordinated arousal. Also important to note is that either route towards shared feelings may be influenced by **iv**) adherence to norms such as emotional display rules or the desire to ‘fit in’ (cf. the group commitment model outlined above) as well as **v**) background contextual factors such as personality differences (including susceptibility to contagion), degrees of affiliation, and the individuals’ relative position or status within a social network (see in particular chapters 9 and 10).

I identify the following 17 contributions as more or less adhering to this model; Schmid (ch.1); Lamm & Silani (ch.5); Brosch (ch.6); Hess, Houde & Fischer (ch.7); Hatfield, Carpenter & Rapson (ch.8); van der Löwe & Parkinson (ch.9); Bruder, Fischer & Manstead (ch.10); Kelly, Iannone & McCarty (ch.12); Lawler, Thye & Yoon (ch.13); Sullivan (ch. 18); Collins (ch.20); Knotterus (ch.21); Protevi (ch.22); Jasper (ch.23); Thelwall & Kappas (ch.25); Garcia, Garas & Schweitzer (cf. 26); and Skowron & Rank (ch. 27). Perhaps not all of these authors would agree with this categorisation, since many of their models display nuances that escape easy generalisation. Nevertheless, my impression was that all of these contributions allow that the individual remains the locus of the emotional state, even if the organisation of all these individual emotions results in the emergence of genuinely group-level dynamics as well as intensified feelings of belonging in each individual.

Worth picking out from this group is Schmid’s chapter (ch.1), because he may at first sight appear to be defending a more radical view. In direct contrast to Gilbert, Schmid

aims to show that “some groups have proper emotions with all the collective consciousness they involve” (p.3). Later on he says: “Group emotions are shared feelings. Shared feelings involve some “phenomenological fusion.” They are “shared” in the strong straightforward sense in which there is one token affective state in which many individuals take part” (p.9). Strong stuff indeed. However, when Schmid claims that only individuals with extreme autism or perhaps psychopathy could go through life without such shared feelings (p.12), we begin to realise that he is describing something more mundane than our Borg-inspired visions of collective consciousness. Schmid is not identifying a conscious state that is autonomously attributed to a collective subject and *not* the individuals involved. He thinks the shared feeling is possessed by a plural subject, rather than a single group subject. In essence, Schmid is counting differently. He looks at the set of individual conscious emotions, and counts one token state, rather than many token states. What justifies this different way of counting? The key justification seems to be that in certain situations, such as a symphony performance, each individual pre-reflectively takes his or her feeling to be a part of a whole, to be ‘our feeling’, rather than something belonging to him or her alone. Presumably what justifies such ascriptions then is the mutual awareness of being in a group and of one’s emotion being aligned with others. This is why I categorise Schmid’s model within the coordinated emotion type.

Given all the build-up about collective consciousness, it is rather disappointing to learn that we are talking about coordinated individual emotions after all. And I find it rather misleading to say there is phenomenal fusion here, because there is no token experience that simultaneously *accesses* the sensations of the different participating individuals. Note that when my brain manages to achieve a singular state of consciousness, despite a multiplicity of sensory inputs, it is because a management system coordinates these inputs to deliver a unified phenomenal scene. I experience the visual field delivered by my right eye *as simultaneous* with the visual field delivered by my left eye, and I maintain a working memory of their comparative qualities. Nothing I have found in this volume is comparable with this sort of unified consciousness. For example, the symphony audience lacks any token experience that as part of its immediate or phenomenal content *contrasts* how the music is simultaneously enjoyable for an individual in the stalls and disturbing to an individual in the circle.

3 Socially extended emotions

The third and final type of model that I identify in the volume is based on what may be called socially extended emotions. This is the primary focus of Jan Slaby’s chapter (ch.3) and is closely aligned with the analysis of infant emotional development that Joel Krueger provides in chapter 11. In both chapters we find the claim that certain emotions are only possible for an individual when there is a social structure available that scaffolds in some sense the individual’s capacity to have that emotion. This is a development of the extended mind thesis, which is the idea that external objects are often physically incorporated into cognitive processes, enabling individuals to perform cognitive tasks that would otherwise be unavailable. (Incidentally Slaby says that extended mind theorising has hitherto been silent with

regard to emotions (p.32). I could hardly let this pass without noting that for some incomprehensible reason, my seminal contribution to this very issue has been neglected (Cochrane 2008)).

A key challenge for the extended mind thesis is to explain how the cases described go beyond the uninteresting sense in which our mental states are causally responsive to the external environment. Why not explain away socially extended emotions by allowing that of course I can only perceive or react to someone's emotional behaviour if they are actually present to me? Similarly, Krueger claims that infants depend on their caregivers to realise certain emotion-regulative functions. But why not simply say that the caregiver manipulates the infant's emotion? Extended mind theorists have appealed to a functional parity between extended cases and cases of information processing internal to the individual that we'd be happy to call cognitive (e.g., Clark and Chalmers 1998). Slaby does not make use of these arguments. Instead he emphasises the notion of 'phenomenal coupling', which I take to be an experience in which my emotional feeling forms a strong gestalt with my awareness of the environment and the social emotional 'atmosphere'. I agree that there is a phenomenon of experiencing emotional atmospheres that stands in need of explanation. But I was not sure that the mechanics of the extended mind thesis helps to explain it. It is difficult to show how any experience, however intense, could entail that a social scenario physically scaffolds my emotional state, since we typically distinguish the intentional object of an experience from the subject or cognitive process bearing that experience. Slaby also appeals to enactivist theories of the mind, which seem to eschew the representation-object distinction, and so might permit more radical conclusions to be drawn from the gestalt experience. I however, need further convincing that the enactive approach has notable advantages over traditional approaches.

Another contribution that I think should be connected with Slaby's and Krueger's discussions is that of Páez & Rimé (ch.14). This is because these authors identify a distinctive feeling of 'emotional fusion' that is similar to the phenomenal coupling described by Slaby. Páez & Rimé reference Durkheim's early descriptions of 'collective effervescence' here. They suggest that, in certain special social contexts only, individuals are capable of experiencing strong absorption within the group, and a sense that they have left behind their separate individual identity. More strikingly to my mind, they link emotional fusion with Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow (p.205), since the optimal alignment of intentions and performance that Csikszentmihalyi describes is supposed to result in the dissolving of boundaries between self and world. Elsewhere in the volume, in the chapter by Lamm & Silani (ch.5) we find a comparable notion cashed out in neurological terms. Lamm and Silani claim that there is a neurological mechanism for detecting the degree of mismatch between self and other (p.73). This mechanism helps us to coordinate our (emotional) behaviours with others, and may be the source of the experience of feeling like a distinct individual. When we no longer detect a mismatch, a sense of absorption or identification with the group results. One interesting implication that none of these authors draw from this suggestion is that the lack of a self-other mismatch representation may be the cause of an *illusion* of sharing a single group-level experience. Of course, if many people were to simultaneously have such an experience, we would strongly suspect that something genuinely collective has occurred. Though as far as I am aware, there is no evidence of any such simultaneous experiences having ever being independently verified.

4 Conclusion

Overall, the volume is a truly fascinating collection of views on phenomena that deserve considerable attention and which challenge some of our basic assumptions about the mind and the social world. The editors should be congratulated for bringing together this research and thereby marking out the territory of collective emotions.

References

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