

AN EMOTION WITHOUT A NAME

Lorne Loxterkamp

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I intend to show that there is an important emotion for which we do not have a name. To describe it will involve establishing its relation to other emotions and so locating it in our moral and social lives.

Nietzsche makes a pertinent observation about the language of psychological states:

Language and the prejudices upon which language is based are a manifold hindrance to us when we want to explain inner processes and drives: because of the fact, for example, that words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of these processes and drives; and where words are lacking, we are accustomed to abandon exact observation because exact thinking there becomes painful; indeed, in earlier times one involuntarily concluded that where the realm of words ceased the realm of existence ceased also. Anger, hatred, love, pity, desire, knowledge, joy, pain – all are names for *extreme* states: the milder, middle degrees, not to speak of the lower degrees which are continually in play, elude us, and yet it is they which weave the web of our character and our destiny.¹

Nietzsche draws our attention to the absence of words, as he contends, for the elusively moderate yet formative parts of our psychology. There is much to think about here. But the question I want to consider is whether our language could lack a specific word for an emotion that is a highly

significant 'extreme state' – indeed, an important emotion in our moral and social lives.

Let's see what emotions we can name. It is really not too difficult to make a provisional list, or rather two lists, because emotions divide between those that are positive, agreeable or pleasant and those that are negative, disagreeable or painful:

admiration adoration affection amazement amusement
 appreciation astonishment awe bemusement bliss
 cheer complacency contempt contentment delight
 disdain elation ecstasy enchantment encouragement
 enjoyment enthrallment entrancement euphoria exaltation
 exultation fascination felicity fondness gayness
 gladness glee gloat gratitude happiness hope intoxication
 joy jubilation love merriness mirth pride rapture
 relief relish respect reverence satisfaction schadenfreude
 scorn self-satisfaction smugness surprise
 sympathy thankfulness transport triumph wonder
 wryness (60)

abhorrence alarm anger angst anguish annoyance
 anomie antipathy anxiety apprehension bitterness
 boredom chagrin commiseration compassion compunction
 consternation contrition crossness dejection
 deploration depression desolation despair despondency
 disappointment disconsolation discontentment discouragement
 disdain disgust disheartenment dismay dissatisfaction
 distress dolefulness dread dudgeon
 embarrassment ennui envy exasperation fear forlornness
 fright frustration fury gloom glumness grief grudge
 guilt hate homesickness hopefulness horror indignation
 ire jealousy lamentation loathing longing melancholy
 misery mournfulness nostalgia outrage panic penitence
 pining pique pity rage rancour regret remorse repentance
 repugnance resentment revulsion rue sadness
 scorn shame shock sorrow startle stun stupefaction

sulkiness terror umbrage unhappiness upset vexation
weltschmerz woe worry wrath yearning (100)

I cannot claim that my trawl through the dictionary and the thesaurus has captured every emotion name – and then some verbs have no noun form, e.g. being appalled, being flabbergasted. Moreover, there might not be general agreement on whether every name on the lists indicates a distinct emotion.² Perhaps it could be argued that some on each list are synonyms that do not really refer to (even slightly) different emotions. And I suppose that not everyone would immediately agree with my excluding, for example, frisson and tenderness. I have not put frisson on either list because I do not think it is an emotion, but rather the marked feeling – the shudder, the shiver – of some positive and negative emotional states: fear, disgust, delight. And I have left out tenderness because I also do not think it is an emotion itself, but rather the gentle expression of certain emotions, say, affection, fondness. Nevertheless, it seems that, allowing for possible additions and deletions, the negative names would still greatly outnumber the positive. What is the explanation? Could there really be many more negative emotions than positive? Well, maybe. But I am inclined to think that the greater number of negative emotion names does not indicate a greater number of negative emotions, but rather reflects the more compelling need to identify that which is unwelcome or harmful.

The difference between the lists suggests at least that our vocabulary lacks names for some positive emotions. Does that matter? Perhaps it doesn't, and we get along just fine. But I think that there is, among the possible, unnamed positive emotions, one that is particularly important, and that we could improve our understanding of a central aspect of our emotional lives if we could easily and correctly identify it, that is, if it had a specific name. We can determine this emotion by considering the fact that emotions have opposites.

There is no denying that emotions are complex phenomena. But I want to explain how emotions have opposites by highlighting only some features of emotion – a very simplified account for the purpose at hand. We have emotions about the things that matter to us for our survival and well-being. Things matter to us insofar as they are either beneficial or congenial, harmful or unwelcome: they serve our interests and we care about them, or they are detrimental and we want to be rid of them. If something is experienced as serving one's interests, as promoting what one values and cares about, then the relevant emotion will be positive, agreeable or pleasant; if, on the other hand, something is experienced as against one's interests, as harming oneself or what one values and cares about, then the relevant emotion will be negative, disagreeable or painful. Accordingly, to be indifferent, not to care one way or another about something, is to have no emotional attitude towards it at all.

Emotions consist of two components that distinguish them one from another: an awareness of (or thought of, belief about) something that is, was or could be; and a positive/agreeable/pleasant or negative/disagreeable/painful reaction to the perceived effect of that something on what one desires, values or cares about. Some examples: fear is a painful reaction to the experience of immediate danger; relief is the pleasure at the ending of something disliked; hope is the agreeable feeling about getting what is desired at another time; grief is the pain at the loss of someone or something loved or valued.

How then can an emotion have an opposite? Emotions can be opposites if they differ in the positive–negative component of the same kind of thing, or if they have the same positive–negative attitude to things that are opposite, or if they differ in both.³ Spelling out opposites can be useful. For instance, by determining the opposites of *scha-denfreude*, which has no English equivalent, we can readily see how this borrowed word fills a gap in our emotional vocabulary. *Schadenfreude* is the positive/agreeable reaction to someone's misfortune or failure, and thus it is the

opposite of pity, the negative/disagreeable reaction to someone's misfortune or failure. Similarly, admiration and envy are opposites: admiration is the positive/agreeable reaction to someone's success or achievement, and envy the negative/disagreeable reaction to someone's success or achievement. It follows then that *schadenfreude* and envy are opposite in both components, as are admiration and pity; and that *schadenfreude* is opposite to admiration in one component and to pity in another. In respect of their contrasts, these four emotions form a set. A simple table may help to make clear exactly where *schadenfreude* belongs:

positive	negative	
<i>schadenfreude</i>	<i>pity</i>	failure
<i>admiration</i>	<i>envy</i>	success

These four emotions are about another's situation, about a person with whom one may or may not be involved. But, in order to locate the unnamed emotion I have in mind, we need to focus on the emotions that are direct responses to what one person does purposively to affect another.

In his illuminating essay 'Freedom and Resentment', P. F. Strawson makes the distinction between kinds of interpersonal emotional attitudes: reactive and self-reactive. Reactive emotions are responses to how one is treated:

We should think of the many different kinds of relationship which we can have with other people – as sharers of a common interest; as members of the same family; as colleagues; as friends; as lovers; as chance parties to an enormous range of transactions and encounters. Then we should think, in each of these connections in turn, and in others, of the kind of importance we attach to the attitudes and intentions towards us of those who stand in these relationships to us, and of the kind of *reactive* attitudes and feelings to which we are ourselves prone. In general,

we demand some degree of goodwill or regard on the part of those who stand in these relationships to us, though the forms we require it to take vary widely in different connections. The range and intensity of our *reactive* attitudes toward goodwill, its absence or its opposite vary no less widely. I have mentioned, specifically, resentment and gratitude; and they are a usefully opposed pair. But, of course, there is a whole continuum of reactive attitude and feeling stretching on both sides of these and – the most comfortable area – in between them.⁴

Gratitude and resentment are indeed opposite emotions, differing in both components. Being grateful is a positive reaction to the experience of having one's interests or values actively promoted; being resentful is the negative reaction to one's interests or values being actively harmed.⁵

When I am grateful or resentful I am typically responding to how I am treated by another. But in this interpersonal area, there are also my own emotional responses to how I treat others:

Just as there are personal and vicarious reactive attitudes associated with demands on others or oneself and demands on others for others, so there are self-reactive attitudes associated with demands on oneself for others. And here we have to mention such phenomena as feeling bound or obliged (the 'sense of obligation'); feeling compunction; feeling guilty or remorseful or at least responsible; and the more complicated phenomenon of shame.⁶

Strawson has already noted a range of positive and negative reactive emotions, presenting gratitude and resentment as a prominent pair of opposite reactive emotions. What is striking is that, although he goes on to identify some negative self-reactive emotions, he does not mention any

positive self-reactive emotions. But, as there are self-reactive attitudes for the agent of ill-will, why shouldn't there also be self-reactive attitudes for the agent of goodwill? The relevant question to ask is: as emotions have opposites, what is the opposite of remorse?

Just as resentment is a certain kind of anger, so guilt has a wider application than remorse for we can speak of survivor's guilt but not in the same case of survivor's remorse. Remorse is the kind of guilt that is the experience of being responsible for acting in a way that damages another, for deliberately causing harm to someone or something one values and cares about, or should value or care about. So remorse is the disagreeable or painful reaction to intentionally harming another. Its opposite then in both components is the agreeable or pleasant reaction to intentionally benefiting another. And what do we call this opposite of remorse? I contend that this is the important emotion for which we do not have a name. Let's call it X.⁷

It might be objected that we can and do describe X, the emotional experience of intentionally benefiting another, as the emotional experience of feeling pleased or feeling appreciated. (Interestingly, if you look back at the list, you won't find corresponding terms for the positive emotions of feeling pleased and feeling appreciated.) But, while it seems right to say that one feels pleased when one feels X-ful, feeling pleased as such does not really capture the experience of X. To say that you feel pleased is a general way of referring to the positive reaction to a wish or desire being fulfilled; and so, while it may often be the case that you feel pleased to have actually benefited another, 'feeling pleased' does not pick out the distinctiveness of X. 'Feeling appreciated' also fails to describe X. One can only feel appreciated in response to someone's appreciation. When one feels X-ful one may also feel appreciated. But one can feel X-ful and not at all feel appreciated. X is the emotional response to intentionally bringing benefit; feeling appreciated is the emotional response to being (gratefully) appreciated. You could feel X-ful and appropriately appreciated at

the same time, or X-ful and not appreciated, or appreciated and not X-ful.

We are now in a position to establish X by defining its place in the field of reactive and self-reactive emotions. The reactive and self-reactive emotions gratitude, resentment, remorse and X are connected in the following ways. For the *negative* reactive and self-reactive there is this relationship: if Anna knowingly acts in a way that harms Beth, then Beth has reason to feel resentful towards Anna. And if Beth justifiably feels resentful towards Anna, then Anna has knowingly committed a harmful act towards Beth, which should compel Anna to feel remorseful. Thus, if Anna has reason to feel remorseful towards Beth, then Beth must have reason to feel resentful towards Anna. For the *positive* reactive and self-reactive emotion there is this relationship: if Amy knowingly acts in a way that benefits Briony, then Briony has reason to feel grateful towards Amy. And if Briony justifiably feels grateful towards Amy, then Briony has acted with the intention to benefit Amy, which should compel Amy to feel X-ful. Thus, if Amy has reason to feel X-ful towards Briony, then Briony has reason to feel grateful towards Amy.

To put the above in a simpler form: (1) If A correctly feels remorseful towards B, then B has reason to feel resentful. (2) If B correctly feels resentful towards A, then A has reason to feel remorseful. (3) If A correctly feels X-ful towards B, then B has reason to feel grateful. (4) If B correctly feels grateful towards A, then A has reason to feel X-ful. And to show the connections between these emotions in a simple table:

positive	negative	
<i>gratitude</i>	<i>resentment</i>	reactive
↑↓	↑↓	
X	<i>remorse</i>	self-reactive

Remorse, a self-reactive emotion of maleficence, is certainly an important emotion. Its sincere expression allows for forgiveness and the repair of a damaged relationship. And we regard its apparent absence, when it is the appropriate emotional state for the wrongdoer to have, as signifying a character defect. So, how could its opposite, a self-reactive emotion of beneficence, not also be an important emotion?

If X had a name, what difference would that make? That's a large question. But I can offer some suggestions. Perhaps we wouldn't give undue attention to the 'warm glow of giving' or the 'helping high' – expressions commonly used to convey the feelings caused by performing altruistic acts.⁸ Neither expression is really satisfactory. They imply that the positive awareness of benefiting another by intending to do so has a certain intensity, which isn't always the case. As with other emotions, the positive, agreeable or pleasant reaction may be strong or mild or hardly register at all, depending on the nature of the act and its effects as well as on the person who performs it and what other emotional states the person has concurrently. Moreover, by emphasizing the feeling, both expressions distort understanding of the agent's emotional state of intentionally benefiting another. That these expressions are problematic is clearly shown by Peter Singer's attempts to support the genuine motivations of effective altruists. He acknowledges that 'Many effective altruists say that in doing good, they feel good. Effective altruists directly benefit others, but indirectly they often benefit themselves.' But he wants it to be clear that 'they are altruists because their overriding concern is to do the most good they can. The fact that they find fulfillment and personal happiness in doing that does not detract from their altruism.' The problem is that effective altruists could be confused with other givers: 'Those who give small amounts to many charities are not so interested in whether what they are doing helps others – psychologists call them warm glow givers. Knowing that they are giving makes them feel good, regardless of the impact of their donations.'⁹ Indeed, if we

understand that we are talking about an emotion, then we will realize that X, like other emotions, can be malformed, susceptible to being sentimentalized or fabricated.¹⁰

If X had a name, then that would help make it a salient part of the thinking we give to understanding the emotional experience of being generous, kind, benevolent, altruistic. In his pioneering study of the 'gift relationship', comparing free and commercial blood donor systems, Richard Titmuss claims that altruism has a 'role in satisfying the biological need to help' and that the 'commercialization of blood and donor relationships represses the expression of altruism, erodes the sense of community'.¹¹ More recently, Michael Sandel approvingly discusses his views and remarks that: 'Titmuss was concerned not only with the declining willingness to give blood but also with the broader moral implications. Beyond its harmful effect on the quantity and quality of blood, the declining spirit of giving made for an impoverished moral and social life.'¹² And it would follow that the impoverishment would involve reduced opportunities to experience X. The idea of a biological need to help would suggest that X has a vital place in our moral and emotional lives. Being able to name X accurately could lead not only to a proper recognition of this emotion but also to a finer appreciation of what contributes to our sense of well-being and self-worth.¹³

Lorne Loxterkamp is a retired child and adolescent psychotherapist. leloxterkamp@gmail.com

Thanks to Katherine Green and to Huw and Maria Williams for helpful advice.

Notes

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 71.

² Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions: The Philosophical Theories* (London: Routledge, 1985), 2.

³ *Ibid.* 4, 5.

⁴ P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 6.

⁵ Of course, there are two more opposites of gratitude and resentment, differing in one component, that make the set (i.e. akin to the set of admiration, envy, schadenfreude, pity): a positive feeling about being harmed, and a negative feeling about being helped. The former seems to be an emotion of masochism, and perhaps the latter could be an emotion of self-respect.

⁶ Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', 15.

⁷ There are two more opposites of X and remorse, differing in one component, that make the set: a positive feeling about intentionally causing harm to another, and a negative feeling about intentionally helping another. The former seems to be an emotion of sadism, and perhaps the latter could be a form of regret.

⁸ For summaries of some psychology studies, see <www.psychologytoday.com/blog/changepower/201708/seven-studies-show-virtue-truly-is-its-own-reward>.

⁹ Peter Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), viii, 5.

¹⁰ Carolyn Price, *Emotion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 156–73.

¹¹ Richard M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (Oxford: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970), 198, 245.

¹² Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 124.

¹³ Since writing this piece, I have discovered the Chinese word *rén* on the list of untranslatable positive words compiled by Tim Lomas (<www.drtemplomas.com>). He interprets it as: 'Humanity, benevolence; the positive feeling of a virtuous person through altruistic behaviour'. According to the Wikipedia entry on *Rén* (Confucianism), it is 'the Confucian virtue denoting the good feeling a virtuous human experiences when being altruistic', and much else. So, apparently, there is a language that has a word for X, if only when applied to altruistic behaviour.