

A Sociology of Religious Emotion

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Introduction

It may seem banal to claim that religion involves emotion: surely it is obvious that being religious involves *feeling* something? If someone meditates but never experiences a sense of equanimity, takes part in Diwali celebrations without being infected by a sense of joyous playfulness, or participates in a funeral without feeling even a touch of sadness or solemnity, something is clearly amiss. In the contemporary situation religious emotion is more visible than ever. Taking a religious tour of the world at the start of the twenty-first century, the journalists Micklethwait and Woolridge (2009) discover that it is the emotionally 'hot' forms of religion that are doing best, from Brazil to Beijing. Even in the exceptionally secular waters of Europe, it is those forms of religion that speak to heart rather than intellect that are attracting the most converts (Champion and Hervieu-Léger 1990).

Strange, then, how little attention has been paid to the emotional dimension of religion in academic work, relative to the vast amount of work devoted to religious beliefs and practices. The bias is even more surprising given how much interest was paid to religious emotion at the time when the academic study of religion was initiated. In an introduction to Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* written in 1923, J. W. Harvey wondered aloud whether the sheer quantity of studies of religious emotion and intuition threatened to swamp the field. Such studies derived not only from theology and philosophy, but from 'Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, and the history and comparative study of religious forms and institutions'. So completely had 'the almost purely rational and ethical approach' to religion been abandoned, he suggested, that enquiries into the nature of religion had

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'tended to overweight the opposite scale'. 'Feeling', he fretted, 'has perhaps more than come into its own' (Otto 1917/1923: pp. x, xi).¹

Harvey might have had in mind any number of contemporary studies. In anthropology he was probably thinking of the school that Evans-Pritchard (1965) later dubbed 'emotionalist', and whose representative R. R. Marett (1914: p. xxxi) famously claimed that 'savage religion is something not so much thought out as danced out'. In sociology he was referring to Durkheim, whose account of religion emphasized the centrality of religious gatherings and the 'collective effervescence' that they generated. In the psychology of religion, William James had recently published *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), in relation to which James himself said that he was 'almost appalled at the amount of emotionality which I find in it' (James 1902/1981: 464–5). In theology, philosophy, and devotional literature there had also been an explosion of interest in religious emotion that went further than Mathew Arnold's milky 'morality touched by emotion' to put instinct and emotion at the very heart of things: Bergson's vitalism in France; studies of mysticism by Evelyn Underhill, Dean Inge, and Baron von Hügel in Britain; Rufus M. Jones's copious writings on the mystical element in the world's religions in America—and, of course, the work of Otto himself.

It is interesting to consider what has happened between then and now to make Harvey's worries about the emotional overburdening of the study of religion look so ill founded. Within sociology an important part of the explanation lies in the supervening influence of positivism, which led to a focus upon those aspects of religion that, like church attendance or neurological activity, can be observed and measured in a way that is dissociated from the personality and social position of the investigator. From this perspective, even belief, in so far as it can be clearly articulated and recorded, seems more solid and significant than feeling. In much empirical sociology of religion a concentration on church religion, and in particular on measurable levels of church attendance and doctrinal belief, reinforced the positivist agenda. Even for sociologists of religion who eschewed positivism,

¹ Harvey was not alone among his contemporaries in expressing this concern. To give a single example, Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1909: ii. 309) mused that 'evidences of a predominantly individual, personal, directly experimental kind... have hitherto been all but completely overlooked by trained historical investigators... now the opposite extreme is tending to predominate, as in Prof. William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*'.

this bias towards the behavioural and intellectual dimensions of religion was reinforced in the post-war period by theoretical approaches like that of Berger and Luckman (1966), which interpreted religion as the means by which human beings render the world meaningful by imposing cognitive order upon ontological chaos. The 'cultural turn' or 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences from the 1970s reinforced the emphasis on language and rationality, and turned religion and culture into systems of signs that could be decoded apart from their social and affective contexts.

A belief-based approach to religion is now so well established in academic and wider discourse that it is common to find the terms 'religion' and 'belief' being used synonymously; or to read studies that assume that an inability on the part of individuals to articulate their beliefs clearly and systematically implies a dilution or diminution of religion. As its very name implies, the rise of 'rational choice theory' in the sociology of religion is not well placed to challenge this bias. Even in disciplines like anthropology that have stronger defences against positivism, and have done most to keep the study of religious emotion alive, a focus on meaning systems and socio-cognitive structures has led to some neglect of emotional, bodily, and relational factors. A recent shift of attention to the body, practices, and material culture has the potential to serve as a useful corrective; in practice, however, it often dwells on linguistic-mediations and constructions, thereby reinforcing neglect of non- or only quasi-linguistic dimensions of life. A bias towards the study of textually mediated religion has also characterized work in religious studies, though the influence of phenomenology prompted some awareness of the multidimensional nature of religion (thus Ninian Smart's analysis (1998) of the seven dimensions of religion includes at least the 'experiential'). In academic theology the rise of Neo-Orthodoxy has also tended to reverse an interest in emotion by rejecting Liberal theology's concern with the more experiential dimensions of religion.

The study of religious emotion is also inhibited by the natural biases of intellectuals and academia. As William James (1902/1981: 89) trenchantly put it:

The first thing to bear in mind (especially if we ourselves belong to the cleric-academic-scientific type, the officially and conventionally 'correct' type, 'the deadly respectable type', for which to ignore others is a besetting temptation) is that nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenome-

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na from our notice, merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves.

Scholars of religion have been characteristically interested in religions with texts, doctrines, beliefs, and literate male elites. Forms of religion or 'spirituality' that have more to do with supporting the everyday lives of ordinary people have been neglected by comparison. Yet the intensive study of religious texts remains a privilege of the few, and religions that speak to the emotions have more widespread appeal, including for those with little schooling and extensive experience of material hardship. The neglect of emotion reflects class, ethnic, and gender bias in the study of religion. Emotional labour, particularly care and concern for the feelings and emotional well-being of others, often lies in the hands of the least privileged in society, who are also poorly represented in the academy.

Given the combined weight of these forces ranged against the study of emotion, it is hardly surprising that the brief flowering of interest in the emotional dimension of religion identified by Harvey and his contemporaries was quickly cut down. What is more surprising is that there are some recent signs of regrowth. In the first chapter of this book we consider the recent multidisciplinary revival of interest in emotion in general, and, in the second chapter, the (lesser) revival of interest in religious emotion. Some of the reasons for this revival of interest are compatible with a positivistic ethos: most notably, the discovery of the significance of emotion by cognitive science, partly as a result of improved techniques of neurological investigation. As we will see, some of this work is turning our traditional picture of cognition on its head by suggesting that sensory and emotional experience is prior to conceptual and linguistic classification and abstract reasoning: we do not first conceptually map the universe and then act in it and experience it, but the other way round. Other causes of revival include the sheltering and stimulating influence of disciplines and approaches that have remained more open to the breadth of social experience, including the phenomenological approach, field-based anthropological and sociological studies, feminist approaches, and philosophical and theological work that has stimulated a revival of interest in classical and medieval traditions of reflection that take emotions seriously, including the Aristotelian and Thomistic.

Nevertheless, the study of emotion continues to be held back by the lack of a systematic account of emotion that can integrate relevant

disciplinary approaches into a defensibly scientific approach—particularly for the human and social sciences. It is this lack that left previous studies of emotion vulnerable to the positivist challenge, which continues to render the sociological study of emotion marginal to the mainstream of sociological enterprise, and which discourages many scholars of religion who might otherwise be interested from taking emotion seriously. This book is designed to make a contribution in this area by proposing a new conceptual framework that can integrate social, cultural, and humanistic approaches, and counter charges that the study of emotion is impossibly undisciplined and subjective. It takes religious emotion as its focus not only because of its historical and scientific importance, but because it has such obvious power in social and personal life, and because it throws many different dimensions of emotion—the social as well as the cultural, bodily, and material—into high relief. Given this intention, the book is deliberately entitled a study of religious emotion (in the singular) rather than religious emotions (in the plural), because particular species of emotion such as love, joy or fear are of interest here primarily as illustrations of the genus of emotion.

A conceptual framework

In developing a conceptual framework for making sense of religious emotion our own disciplinary commitment—to the sociological study of religion—influences the starting point. What this means is that a widespread popular as well as scientific tendency to reduce emotions to something private, personal and subjective—to inner states accessible only by introspection—is rejected in favour of an analysis of emotion as constructed in the interplay between social agents *and* structures. On this account emotion is ‘both–and’ rather than ‘either/or’: both personal and relational; private and social; biological and cultural; active and passive.

To illustrate what is meant by this, imagine a woman employee complaining to her male boss about the fact that her case for promotion has been turned down. In the middle of the interview she feels tears welling up and her voice beginning to quaver. Noticing this, the boss wonders whether he is being manipulated into feeling sorry for her. He reflects that if he were in the same situation he might feel

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angry, but he would never allow himself to cry. He feels wary. What this example shows is that emotion is never 'just' about some purely personal, 'inner' state of feeling. The woman does indeed experience 'psycho-physical sensations'. She may find it hard to choke back the tears and she may go away and cry in private. But her feelings do not belong to her interiority; they belong to the situation as a whole (the lack of promotion, her position in the company, her relationship with this man). They register this situation, set her stance within it, and propel her to try to change it. In that sense, her tears do indeed have a purpose. In addition, the woman feels upset—rather than angry—because she has been socialized to feel this way in this sort of situation (one of frustrated ambition and/or perceived injustice, one in which a less powerful woman confronts a more powerful man). Innumerable social and cultural influences have been brought to bear over a lifetime to engrain the belief in both participants that sorrow is a more 'normal' and acceptable emotion for women to feel than anger or rage. If she were to become angry she might be categorized as difficult, emotional, or irrational, or even hysterical. Thus her emotions follow the social norm. This does not mean that they are any less real or 'genuine' than the anger of a man in the same situation. It simply shows that emotions express our assessment of a situation and try to influence that situation in the ways that are socially available to us. In other words, emotion is an essential part of the varied socio-cultural contexts that frame our ongoing social encounters and set pathways of opportunity and constraint.

In insisting that emotion is thus social *and* personal, we set one of the cornerstones of our approach. We also distance ourselves from the kind of sociological approach that stresses the importance of social construction or conditioning or structures to such an extent that it neglects the possibility of individual agency altogether. This enables us to recognize the value of both sociological and psychological (as well as some biological and neurological) approaches, and to offer a framework that can hold the two together. To a greater extent than many sociologists of emotion, however, we emphasize the two-sidedness of the relations between emotional agents and structures. Only in a one-sided situation are emotions overwhelmed or determined by society. In other circumstances emotional norms are strong, but not irresistible: agents can resist and change them as well as reproduce them, albeit in conditions that are not of their own choosing.

Despite what some sociologists and psychologists often imply, however, emotions are shaped not just by interpersonal relations but by our ever-changing relations with complexes of cultural symbols and material settings. Read any good novel and you will find that the mood is set not only by descriptions of human beings and their interactions, but by settings and objects. Our emotional life is shaped by encounters not only with living beings, but with dead ones, imagined ones, transcendent ones, and inanimate ones. To consider only self and society is to miss the significance of the culture, material objects, memories, places, and symbols. The study of religion is particularly impoverished by such neglect. Religious emotion has to do not only with social relations in the narrow 'human' sense, but with 'super-social' relations—such as those we may have with sacred sites, landscapes, artefacts, and beings.

In order to capture these aspects of emotion, the scheme we propose pays attention not only to the relations between agent and society, but to those between agent and symbol, and between society and symbol. We speak more of 'symbols' than culture simply because they are so important in religion for mediating between the human and the divine. Sometimes we vary the usage and speak of 'material-symbols' in order to capture the material dimension of a symbol—for example, blood, water, a particular place in the landscape, an artefact, a book, or a building. We also speak of 'culture' or 'material culture' as a general way of designating this whole category of extra-human significance, and of mediating between different academic discourses.

Thus the scheme we propose considers emotion as generated in the interactions between self and society, self and symbol, and symbol and society. As we will see, the relations between society and sacred symbol have received a limited amount of attention, not least in Durkheim's recognition of the importance of the relations between a sacred gathering and a 'totem' (Durkheim 1912/2001) and in Mary Douglas's exploration of relations between different types of social structure and different symbolic systems (Douglas 2003). Such work notes the importance of sacred symbols for collective emotion, and vice versa. Thus a national flag may be a powerful means of generating, focusing, and communicating national sentiment; but when such sentiment wanes the symbol also loses its power. Our scheme emphasizes the two-sidedness of the relation. Collective symbols do not automatically generate, shape, and sustain emotion in the way that is sometimes implied by Durkheim. Certainly a sacred symbol may serve as a

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powerful stimulus for collective anger, hatred, worship, or joy; but it is also true that social groups and gatherings may fail to be moved by symbols intended to stir them, may reject symbols proposed by an elite, or may turn cold towards places, objects, and rituals that were once the focus of collective sentiment.

The relation between individuals and symbols is more neglected in sociological study. More illumination is provided by psychological approaches such as object-relations theory and dream analysis, and, in relation to religion, by anthropological studies that analyse the emotional significance of selected objects and symbols for individuals as well as groups and societies. Without denying that there is a social dimension to the way in which, say, a migrant brings to a new land gods from his or her old life, we argue that it is also important to pay attention to the element of personal selection, election, and sometimes resistance—and the emotional dimension of all these. Individuals carry ‘in their hearts’, and sometimes on their bodies, symbols that have uniquely personal emotional resonances: an icon, a talisman, a form of dress, a vial of holy water, a lock of hair, images of ancestors, photos, and so on. Such objects may assist personal emotional cultivation that reinforces collective emotion or offers an escape and an alternative, or both. In some cases individuals create new sacred objects: new representations of gods, demons, saints, and so on, and these may eventually be consecrated by a group and become the focus of collective sentiment.

As these examples show, it is often impossible to draw a neat line between personal and social-material symbols. Yet the distinction is important for opening up perspectives that an exclusive concentration on emotion in relation to society and its symbols closes down. Just as we reject the view that emotional structures squeeze out emotional agency, so by separating out the relation between agent and personal symbols we reject the view that cultural and religious traditions are hegemonic disciplines imposed on individuals by whom they are uncritically internalized. Cultural and religious traditions set parameters and continuities, while allowing room for manoeuvre and change through the manipulation of ideas and symbols. Individuals shape and modify symbols in a way that gives purchase over their own lives and personal dramas, while at the same time relating them to wider webs of symbolic and social significance.

The three sets of relations that give shape to our analytic scheme should not be interpreted as separate, self-contained processes. Rather,

this way of conceiving of them serves to prise apart processes that are in reality closely bound up with one another. For example, in the actual flow of religious life, feelings are not stirred first in collective ritual, then through contemplation of sacred symbols, and later in the privacy of one's own home. Rather, a Roman Catholic woman may, for example, show personal devotion to Mary, whose statue she venerates in church, whose hymns she sings with joy, whose image decorates the main room of her house, and whose example she tries to embody in a life of care for others. Each element relates to, feeds back on, informs, and reinforces the other. It is also possible to think of examples in which the processes undermine rather than reinforce one another, and we pay as much attention to these 'disconnections' and their emotional significance as to the connections. Our tripartite scheme is a tool that can be used to make sense of the interwoven elements of such exchanges, taking them apart to understand them better, but not neglecting to put them back together and show how they relate, or fail to relate, to one another.

In what follows we speak of these three sets of relations as 'dialectical' relations, because they are interactive, mutually shaping, and often mutually constitutive. As we will argue, perfectly balanced or reciprocal dialectics are probably the exception rather than the rule in emotional life. A dialectical approach helps to clarify instances of one-sided relations and identify not only what is present in an emotional situation, but also what is absent or 'blocked'. Thus our scheme allows us to investigate not only why something does occur, but why it does not. Many social, psychological, material, and cultural factors influence an emotional pattern. An analysis of unbalanced dialectics can ask which forces are absent, what hinders positive feedback, and what leads to a negative feedback or a broken connection. For example, when a religious leadership establishes a new religious symbol in a sacred space, it is as important to be open to the question whether and why it fails to evoke the expected emotional response in the religious community as to whether and why it succeeds. Similarly, if individuals consistently fail to feel what is expected in a particular ritual setting, it is useful to consider whether this is because the emotional standards of the community are undefined or vague, or because individuals have become unwilling to accept the authority of the community, or both.

Emotional regimes

In order to hold together the different dialectical processes involved in emotional situations we propose the concept of an 'emotional regime'. This captures the way that emotions are integral to the structured social and material relations that constitute a particular social unit or setting—whether a business, a family, an Internet-based fan club, or a religious community. Like the wider social ordering with which it is bound up, an emotional regime has an internal coherence and boundedness, though it can enter a state of flux, imbalance, or disintegration. Regimes persist over time, and transcend individuals, shaping what they can feel, how they can feel it, the way they can express their feelings, and hence the forms of social relationship and courses of action that are open to them. In this way they play an important role in shaping and reproducing structures of power. Countering the widespread assumption that emotions are of little public or political significance, we build on the work of authors like Arlie Hochschild (1983, 1998, 2003) and William Reddy (2001), plus a growing number of political theorists, who point out the significance of personal and collective emotion in shaping relations and inequalities of power.

The concept of an emotional regime also allows us to characterize religious emotion in terms of the social and cultural relations that help to constitute it, rather than by reference to a particular type of feeling: whether the awe, thrill, and fascination proposed by Rudolph Otto; the solemn and expansive sentiments singled out by William James; or the sense of peace and calm that has more recently come to be associated with spirituality. On our account, religious emotions are first and foremost those emotions that are integral to religious regimes—and hence to their social and cultural relations. They may include any emotion or combination of emotions: hatred or love, anxiety or calm, grief or joy, terror or equanimity.

Characteristically, an emotional regime holds together a repertoire of different emotions, and specifies their rhythm, significance, mode of expression, and combination. Religious regimes confront the everyday empirical world with an ideal social and material order, and interpret the one in relation to the other. Setting personal and social life in relation to such 'alternate ordering',² they place human life in a

² This term, taken from Quaker theology, is discussed and further explained in Chapter 2.

perspective that stretches before and beyond a finite lifespan. In the process, religious regimes display, regulate, and enforce the standards by which some emotions are exalted and others are abased. They offer a structured emotional repertoire that guides how adherents feel about themselves, one another, and their wider circumstances. They educate and structure sensibility not only in relation to daily tasks and duties, but across the life course, and they help in the navigation of its transitions and crises.

As well as being a significant context for the formation, cultivation, disciplining, and expression of emotion, religion is one of the most important crucibles for emotional change and transformation, even on the part of adults. To join a religion is to experience a new way of feeling about self, others, society, and the world. Religious people learn to sound the emotional notes approved by the religions to which they belong, and to do so in ways that are authorized by their communities of belonging. In doing so, their emotional lives are formed according to an approved pattern of coherence, not through mere conditioning but through active engagement. Though they utilize endlessly different techniques and strive at an equally varied range of outcomes, most religions promise to transfigure emotional lives according to a pattern of order that is embodied and expressed by a religious group, its members, and its sacred symbols, both personal and collective.

We can illustrate many of these points by way of the sacred–secular example of Christmas. It is impossible to understand this festival without taking account of its emotional regime, in which notes of joy, benevolence, family feeling, relaxation, goodwill, humour, hospitality, fond remembrance, forgiveness, and loving warmth are especially stressed. The emotional regime of Christmas is engendered, in part, by established but evolving social relations: parties, family gatherings, family rituals, religious rituals (nativity plays, church services), civic and national rituals (street decorations and lighting; the message of pope, president, or monarch). These are interwoven with cultural and symbolic elements: special television programming, Christmas presents, food, alcohol, spruce trees, scents, lights, and music. The emotionally laden symbols of Christmas include the nativity scene, angels, Father Christmas/St Nicholas, carol-singers, snow, robins, reindeers, and parcels. Together, all these elements conspire to shape ‘the Christmas spirit’—the emotional regime of Christmas.

It is called a ‘regime’ for a good reason. There are inducements to conform, and sanctions for non-compliance. Those who remain

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indifferent, grumpy, anti-social, or mean-spirited at Christmas time will come under heavy pressure to give a more appropriate emotional performance. Emotional dissidents are sanctioned and castigated as 'Scrooges', 'bah humbugs', and general miseries. The office worker at the Christmas party who refuses to wear a paper hat, sing carols, or smile threatens to lower the emotional tone for others. It would be better if he had stayed at home. Likewise, inappropriate objects must be excluded. Even though this is a Christian festival, no one would display the crucified Christ: the story of the Japanese tea house that displayed a crucified Santa is humorous because it flouts the unwritten rule. There is an emotional logic to the situation that must not be contradicted. It is possible to rebel against the emotional regime of Christmas, but not to escape. Those who 'get into the spirit' find personal and social satisfaction not only in doing so but in conforming to the regime. Those who do not are left to dwell on their feelings of loneliness, irritation, or defiant rebellion.

Dangers of reductionism

There are many dangers to be faced in developing an account of religious emotion, and several of them involve some kind of reductionism. The conceptual scheme proposed here reacts against three common forms in academic treatments of emotion: sociological reductionism, which reduces emotions to social forces and collective sentiments; psychological reductionism, which is interested only in individual psychic states; cultural or symbolic reductionism, which reduces emotions to cultural scripts and symbolic systems. Put more positively, the scheme we develop integrates all three approaches and seeks to broaden them by relating them to one another.

Even if we avoid these dangers, however, there is another to be wary of—namely the tendency to claim an exaggerated role for emotion itself. In a study of religious emotion the temptation is to reduce religion to its emotional aspects—especially when this element has been so neglected in previous work. Although this book attempts to demonstrate the importance of religious emotion, we suggest that the place of emotion in a given form of religion is an issue that should remain open to empirical exploration. There is significant variation in

the degree to which different forms of religion are emotionally expressive and emotionally 'explicit'. At one extreme there are those kinds of religion, including most contemporary spirituality, that have as their stated aim emotional amelioration and transformation, and whose teachings, rituals, and so on are explicitly directed to this end. At the opposite extreme are forms of religion that make little reference to the emotions, and that play down and proscribe emotional expression. Some of the latter may be strongly practice based—what matters is doing things rather than feeling things—whereas others are more oriented to scholarly study and interpretation—what matters is knowledge not feeling. These variations are important. While it is hard to think of a religion that makes no reference to emotion (even to love, or peace, or lust), and plausible to suggest that even the most rational forms of religion have their own emotional regimes (which probably exalt equanimity and sanction emotional display), the genuine diversity should not be downplayed.

There is a further danger to be faced in trying to capture feelings in scholarly language. We have noted how the linguistic turn with its emphasis on discourse leads in this direction. Some historians of emotion have proposed an approach that considers not emotions but 'emotionology': a society's articulated and textually accessible emotional teachings and rules. This points to important truths: that emotions are bound up with language, that being able to put emotion into words shapes the emotion itself, and that emotional standards are often set in the texts, teachings, and symbols of an emotional regime. However, it is an intellectual's wishful thinking to imagine that language can ever capture and convey the complexity and ambiguity of emotion. Scholarly language (like this) is clumsy in dealing with feelings compared with the language of fiction, poetry, and drama. Emotion, including religious emotion, is expressed through ritual, music, art, and architecture precisely because rationalized language does not suffice. With this in mind, an academic discussion like this one must frankly acknowledge its limitations. It is easier to study intellectual aspects of religion than emotional ones, because the tools of the academy are honed for the task. But it is unfair to dismiss the study of religious emotions—let alone the emotions themselves—because academic language is unable to unfold the full complexity and profundity of emotional life.

Reason and emotion

We have left a final obstacle to the study of religious emotion to last—but not least. Put simply, this objection holds that all emotions—religious ones included—are irrational disturbances of our ‘animal nature’, which have more to do with the body and inner sensations than with thought and reason, and which are irrational and unintelligible. As Martha Nussbaum (2003b: 275) summarizes this approach, emotions are nothing but ‘thoughtless natural energies’. As such, emotion is assumed to be not only difficult to study, but unworthy of study.

This view has been influential in much positivist and empiricist-derived philosophy and cognitive psychology. Its traces can be discerned in fields as widely spread as law, public policy, economics, and theology. Even influential writers on emotion have shared some of its presuppositions. For philosophical ‘emotivists’ like A. J. Ayer and R. M. Hare, emotion is an expression of personal inclination or disinclination rather than any kind of rational, descriptive, cognitive engagement with the world. Even for Freud, emotion is something basic and untamed that propels us from within and threatens to well up from inner depths and shake the veneer of civilized life. This view of emotion as a dark and dangerous force—a beast within—was anticipated by social commentators in the revolutionary era who feared the power of crowds, uprisings, and mob rule. The influence of books like Charles McKay’s *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1841) has lasted to the present day. Faced by unexpected events like the upsurge of feeling surrounding the death and burial of Princess Diana, it is interesting to see how many people fall back on explanations that involve ideas about irrational foolishness, irresistible mob sentiment, dangerous and uncontrollable populism, and the hysteria of uneducated masses.

At the root of this approach lies a stark opposition between reason and emotion that goes back to the beginning of the modern era and has played an important role in structuring Western thought ever since. For Enlightenment thinkers reason held the key to progress, and unreason was the enemy. In so far as it was riddled with emotive superstition and priestly dogma, religion must be banished or reformed. Although Romantic thinkers opposed this view and attacked the inhuman and destructive potentials of reason, science, and industry, they often perpetuated the idea that reason and emotion stand in opposition to one another.

Such a dichotomous way of thinking was a child of the era of scientific discovery, technological progress, industrialization, bureaucratization, and colonialism. It is alien to other cultures and, indeed, to earlier Western thought. Classical thinkers including Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics had different ways of classifying the parts of the soul and the dynamics of human knowledge, and a greater appreciation of the rationality of emotion (Sorabji 2002; Nussbaum 2003a; Konstan 2005). Christian culture supported a biblical view in which the ‘heart’ is the seat of knowledge, and the cultivation of sentiment is an essential part of the quest for wisdom and truth. In a long tradition of practical and theological reflection, unruly and uncontrollable ‘passions’ are seen as the enemy of both knowledge and righteousness, and a right ordering of feeling—particularly of loves—as essential for discernment and discrimination (O’Donovan 1980; Dixon 2003; Rosenwein 2006).

Many of the serious flaws in the modern tendency to divide reason from emotion have been exposed in recent decades, not only by philosophy and a revival of interest in classical thought, but by developments in cognitive science. One of the intriguing findings of neuroscience is that, far from being the enemy of reason, rationality seems to require it. The neurologist Antonio Damasio reports on research that finds that people who suffer damage to part of the prefrontal cortex become unable to make a decision. In *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio (1994/2005: 193–4) describes the process of trying to make an appointment with a patient suffering such damage:

I suggested two alternative dates, both in the coming month and just a few days apart from each other. The patient pulled out his appointment book and began consulting the calendar. The behaviour that ensued, which was witnessed by several investigators, was remarkable. For the better part of half an hour, the patient enumerated reasons for and against each of the two dates: previous engagements, proximity to other engagements, possible meteorological conditions, virtually anything that one could think about concerning a simple date. [He was] walking us through a simple cost–benefit analysis, an endless outlining and fruitless comparison of options and possible consequences.

Damasio concludes that without feeling we are unable to navigate the world and make sense of it. As the philosopher Ronald de Sousa (2003: 249) puts it, ‘emotions are among the mechanisms that control

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the crucial feature of *saliency* amongst what would otherwise be an unmanageable plethora of objects of attention, interpretations, and strategies of inference and conduct'. Even disciplines such as physics and maths seem to involve intuition, 'hunches', inspiration, and 'the recruitment of body-based, image-schematic logic to perform abstract reasoning' (Johnson 2007: 181; see also Lakoff and Núñez 2000). These conclusions are supported by work in the philosophy of emotion, which has undermined the non-cognitivism of the emotivists.³ For philosophers such as De Sousa (1989), Solomon (1993), and Nussbaum (2003a), both reason and emotion have to do with judgements of truth and value and, as such, are amenable to evidence, and involve choice and responsibility. Like thought, emotions are *about* something. They deliver information about the world, and they may be true or false. Indeed, for Nussbaum (2003a), emotions are simply 'upheavals of thought'.

Why, then, has it seemed so obvious to so many people that reason and emotion are not only different, but opposed? One explanation is that this is an instance where our words lead us astray. They make it easy to imagine that 'emotion' and 'reason' are 'things' that can be located and measured and neatly compartmentalized. But it is a mistake to hypostasize the terms. Like emotion, 'rationality' is merely a collective term that directs attention to a range of processes and phenomena. In the case of reason, these include: 'collecting information, listening attentively, elaborating arguments, comparing usages, testing hypotheses' (Lash 1988: 63). Reason is affected by personal, affective, and experiential factors, just as emotion is affected by rational and linguistic ones.

But it is not only our words that lead us astray. So too do the social institutions and cultural practices that shape and embody our ideas. As poststructuralism has taught us, binary oppositions in language are linked to a hierarchical ordering. This is certainly the case for reason and emotion, where claims to superior rationality are used to justify unequal distributions of power and resources between men and women, adults and children, whites and 'lower races', humans and animals, adults and children, academic elites and 'lay' people, science

³ By cognition we simply mean processes that deliver information about the world (whether reliable or not).

and the arts, and enlightened secularism (or rational religion) and popular superstition. Our knowledge is structured by these 'deep binaries', which often reinforce one another in sets of reinforcing pairs—emotion/reason, body/mind, male/female, and so on (Lupton 1998; Braidotti 2002; Ahmed 2004). This process is institutionally supported by the prestige and wealth of certain communities that claim to represent rationality ('hard' science, economics, the law, secularism) and the relative degradation of others (the arts, caring occupations, 'soft' science, religion).

This is not to deny that we can discern real differences between emotion and reason, nor that these also lend plausibility to a separation between the two. Emotion seems more 'basic' and inescapable than rational thought. It involves bodily sensation as well as mental activity. It can be affected by drugs as well as by external circumstance. Feelings can be powerful and urgent, and may seem to sweep us along in spite of ourselves. They may lead us to do foolish and irrational things, and they may seem beyond our control. In what follows we say more about these differences. Our view is not that they are unimportant, but that they are not as absolute as often assumed. Rather than imagining reason and emotion, mind and body, as ontologically different from one another, we can rephrase the distinction in terms of the emergent reflective and abstract cognitive activities—supported by certain institutional arrangements and disciplines—that we associate with mind and reason, but that are nevertheless grounded in, and shaped by, activities of bodily perception, movement, and feeling. Thus Calhoun (2003: 244) speaks of a 'rational cognitive set'—a set of beliefs that consists of reflectively held, articulable judgements—which constitutes only a small illuminated portion of our cognitive life, and a larger 'unarticulated framework for interpreting our world, which, if articulated, would be an enormous network of claims'. The latter is manifest through feeling and sensibility and action rather than in articulated awareness, but may nonetheless be accurate, reliable, and 'rational' (if articulated and examined). An important corollary is that neither emotions nor thoughts are primarily inner, psychic states—they belong not only to the mind but to *situations* that they help us to perceive, assess, and transform. Thus the study of emotion is complementary to the study of other dimensions of social life and culture, including the rational.

Method, scope, and focus

Since we had neither a theory of religious emotion to deduce from, nor systematic empirical material to induce from, our approach is largely abductive: it develops a probable explication of the varied and contradictory manifestations of religious emotions we see around us.⁴ It is theoretically driven to the extent that we attempt to reconcile existing theoretical approaches, and it is empirically driven to the extent that it is informed by a wide range of case studies of religious emotion in contemporary and historic societies, both Western and non-Western.

Some of the data we draw on come from our own research: both empirical work carried out in contemporary Europe and the USA, and work in historical sociology of religion (from early Christianity to nineteenth-century revivals).⁵ This is supplemented by many examples of religious emotion drawn from a range of studies and disciplines. While there is no attempt to try to cover religious emotion around the world in a systematic fashion, we have sampled emotion across a range of societies and times. As sociologists, our main interest is in religion in modern Western societies. But we could not ignore the benefits of considering emotion in societies besides our own, benefits that include rendering our own ethnocentric assumptions more visible; throwing into relief modern societies' emotional distinctiveness; demonstrating how the emotional rules we take for granted look as peculiar from the perspective of other times and places as theirs do to us.

Nevertheless, the book culminates in an attempt to make sense of religious emotion in late modern societies. We initially thought of this as a test of the conceptual scheme we develop in the preceding chapters. As we probed the subject, however, we became increasingly aware of its inherent interest. Not only is it fascinating to consider the place of religious emotion in late modern societies, but investigating the difficulties and opportunities it faces is also illuminating of wider features of our societies and emotional lives.

⁴ Deduction and induction are in any case threadbare ways of understanding how we think, since neither takes the importance of concepts and conceptual and theoretical framing seriously enough. No one ever simply induces, and deductions are only ever as good as their premises. (Thanks to Andrew Sayer for reflection on this point.)

⁵ A number of the contemporary examples of religious emotion are drawn from Woodhead's research in Kendal, UK (2000–2), which was carried out as part of a team comprising Paul Heelas (PI), Ben Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Karin Tusting, and was supported by the Leverhulme Trust; and from Woodhead's research in Asheville (2006), which was carried out in collaboration with Helen Berger, and was supported by a British Academy grant.

To clarify the plan of the book as a whole, it moves from the more general to the more particular. In Chapter 1 we start by presenting our understanding of emotion in general, and in Chapter 2 we do the same for religious emotion. We introduce and amplify our concept of an 'emotional regime', which is then broken down into the separate dialectical processes reviewed above. Chapter 3 considers situations where the three dialectical processes reinforce one another, while Chapter 4 looks at what happens when they become disconnected. Chapter 5 considers power and religious emotions, and analyses how emotions help produce, resist, and reproduce inequalities of power and status, both within religious communities and in other social domains. Having constructed this analytic framework for analysing religious emotion, Chapter 6 puts it to use in trying to make sense of religious emotion in contemporary Western societies. After a brief conclusion, we offer a practical appendix to guide those who wish to take the study of emotion further through their own research.

The time is ripe for a systematic study of religious emotion. Besides the illumination provided by the founders of the academic study of religion, we now have a host of empirical studies of religious emotion to draw on, plus a fresh impetus provided by the recent surge of multidisciplinary interest in emotion. Until recently the sociology of emotion has proceeded without much reference to religion, while sociology of religion has proceeded without much reference to emotion. This book illustrates the benefits of bringing the two fields into relation with one another. For the study of religion these include a more rounded approach to the field, and a correction of a long-standing bias towards intellectual and elite forms of religion. For the study of emotion, the effect is to bring some neglected aspects of emotion into sharp focus, including its role in motivation and orientation, the significance of collective rituals and symbols, and the importance of emotions for social change. For the study of late modern societies, attention to religious emotion highlights neglected themes, including the changing nature of sacred values and symbols. Overall, by offering a systematic scheme for interpreting and studying religious emotion, we hope to overcome the objection that the topic is too subjective to be treated scientifically, and show how much there is to be gained by returning to this fascinating subject.