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Becoming Who We Are through Affective Engagement with Others: Mindshaping, Agency, and the Epistemic Role of the Emotions

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6.1 Introduction

The aim of the contribution is to explore the ways in which our affective encounters with others shape our selves in the sense of enabling us to become reasons-responsive agents. It is a well-established theory in the philosophy of mind that self-consciousness in the sense of our ability to think about ourselves depends on social interactions with others. All human beings, insofar as they are conscious and possess intentionality, have a first-person perspective on the world—a capacity that we arguably share with many nonhuman animals. This is to say that there is something 'it is like' for them to experience and engage with the world. However, in addition to this, humans also possess the capacity to think about themselves as such, that is, to conceive of themselves as having a

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perspective; a capacity that is paradigmatically manifested by a person's ability to form 'I'-thoughts. This capacity to think 'I'-thoughts, in turn, depends on an awareness of others. For one thing, to develop an understanding of oneself as a subject with an individual perspective on the world, it is necessary to also develop an understanding of others as subjects with their own perspectives—it is only via contrasting our own perspective with those of others that we come to appreciate our perspectives as such (e.g., Musholt 2015). Moreover, in order to learn to think 'I'-thoughts we need to acquire a language, and this is only possible via membership in a linguistic community (Baker 2014).

The capacity to think 'I'-thoughts, in turn, enables a range of capacities that are associated with personhood and reflective agency: to think about what we have reason to believe, want and do, to develop a sense of our past and future, to ask ourselves who we want to be, and to live a morally significant life. It is this latter capacity for reasons-responsive agency that is the focus of this chapter. My claim is that intersubjective encounters, in particular as they encompass an affective dimension, play a crucial role in shaping ourselves as agents. Accordingly, I will pay special attention to the role of the emotions in our interactions with others in the context of the question of how we acquire the capacity for reasons-responsive agency.

6.2   Persons as Essentially Second Persons

A turn to developmental psychology is instructive in approaching this question. It shows, not only that human infants are deeply dependent on others, but also that, right from birth onwards, the interactions between infants and their caregivers display an emotional involvement of both partners (Reddy 2010). Importantly, these affectively laden interactions play a crucial role in shaping how we come to experience ourselves, others, and the world around us. As Baier puts it, "[p]ersons essentially are second persons, who grow up with other persons" (Baier 1985, 84).

It is obvious to anyone who has ever interacted with an infant, that right from the start, caregivers and infants engage in affect-laden communicative interactions with each other. This makes sense, as infants depend on intensive care on the part of adults for their survival. This means that

they rely on attentive adults who are attuned to their bodily, facial, and vocal expressions and can interpret these so as to respond to the infant's needs. Such infant–caregiver interactions are not only crucial for the homeostatic regulation of the infant's body (e.g., via feeding and changing the infant, or providing warmth when required), but also scaffold the infant's making sense of themselves and the world around them (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou 2017). This sense-making process begins with basic inter-actions: for instance, with the way an adult smiles and coos at the smile of the infant, and the infant's mimicry of the adult in return, or with the way in which the infant is held, stroked, and spoken to in order to be com-forted, soothed, or have their attention directed towards meaningful things. It also begins with the way in which an adult might respond to the initially unintentional movements of an infant by interpreting them as, say, attempts at grasping a nearby object and by putting the object into the child's hand. The infant, in turn, might take pleasure in suddenly holding this object in their hand and—over the course of repeated interactions of this kind and while gaining an increasing degree of control of their move-ments—might come to interpret their own movement as just such an attempt at grasping. This shows that already at the level of our early bodily engagements with the environment, the social scaffolding provided by adults takes on an important role for our understanding of what it is that we are doing. Thus, infants rely on social scaffolding for their understand-ing of the world around them, including their possibilities for interacting with the world (Bruner 1990; McGeer 2001). As McGeer puts it: "Parents treat their children as intentional in practices that initially extend beyond their intentional competence, leaving the parents to maintain, and even exaggerate, the formal structure and affective import of such interactions for both" (McGeer 2001, 122).

Again, emotions play an important role in the processes of social learn-ing that are involved here. Thus, the affective reactions of others provide infants with important clues about the value of an object, an event, or a person. Indeed, there is a large body of literature that confirms that young children are sensitive to such clues and use them in processes of what has been termed "affective social learning" (Clément and Dukes 2017). For instance, we know since the 1980s from studies on social referencing that infants register the emotional reactions of others to a given situation in order to calibrate their own emotional response. For example, in the

so-called visual cliff paradigm, 12-month-old infants either crawled across a class plate that was designed to show an apparent cliff or refrained from doing so depending on the positive or negative facial expression of their caregiver (Sorce et al. 1985). Over the past decades, these findings have been confirmed and followed up in various ways. Taken together, these studies show that infants learn from others by being receptive to the affective appraisals of their social community (Clément and Dukes 2017). That is, in situations of uncertainty, infants decide how to evaluate the situation at hand by referring to the emotional expressions of others. As Harris has argued, this allows them to "discern and acquire the emotional convictions of the surrounding culture toward a plethora of otherwise ambiguous stimuli" (Harris 2019, 72). This includes emotional convictions regarding objects, foods, but also strangers. For example, when 12–14-month-olds watch their mother interact with a stranger in an anxious fashion, they will subsequently express more fear at the stranger's approach compared to a stranger that the mother had interacted with in a positive fashion (De Rosnay et al. 2006). Several follow-up studies show that young children pick up on a variety of emotional expressive displays of other people, including people they don't know, in order to form positive or negative impressions of individuals, and that those impressions can also be generalized towards the individual's social group (for an overview and discussion, see Harris 2019).[1]

In addition, the expression and experience of emotions itself advances through the functional coupling between child and caregiver (Greenwood 2016). According to Greenwood, at first infants express emotional precursors, for instance the experience of displeasure, which is expressed via crying and motor unrest. These emotional precursors function as "assistance-soliciting devices" (Greenwood 2016, 23) whose role is to sustain interpersonal and—later in development—intrapersonal regulation. They direct the attention of the caregiver towards the source of displeasure and caregivers instinctively respond to these signals in various

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[1] Interestingly, already at the age of 12 months, infants are able to discern the relative expertise of others with respect to the situation in question and regulate their behavior towards an ambiguous stimulus more in accordance with the affective information of a perceived expert than a nonexpert (Stenberg 2009). This suggests that they are selectively rather than indiscriminately receptive to the emotional information provided by others.

ways, involving, for example, child-directed speech and touch, mirroring of facial expressions and other ways of removing the source of distress, resulting in feelings of pleasure on the part of the infant as well as the caregiver. Crucially, the infant also possesses motor-mimicry abilities, which enable infants to mimic the facial expressions of their caregivers, thereby establishing "contingencies between expression and feeling" (Greenwood 2016, 88). Through repeated cycles of infant–caregiver interaction the child's emotional development is scaffolded into more specific emotional expressions and their accompanying categorizations. Over the course of such interactions, the child is taught which objects and situations warrant what kind of emotional response, how to identify and name a particular emotional response, but also which action tendencies that are associated with the response are appropriate or inappropriate. Thus, social interaction plays an important role in shaping children's capacity for emotional self-regulation and self-attribution.

Importantly, these early affective-communicative interactions seem to possess a normative dimension. In addition to introducing infants to the values of their social group, interactions between infants and caregivers seem to exert a certain normative pull on both parties. Thus, caregivers regularly feel beholden to respond to the infant's requests; they often find themselves urgently trying to interpret and accommodate the infant's "ostensive expressive" signals (Greenwood 2016, 23). At the same time, infants seem to have an expectation that their requests be responded to and feel negative affect when the interactions between themselves and their caregivers break down (Reddy 2010). This can be demonstrated, for example, by means of the still-face paradigm. In this paradigm, which was developed by Tronick et al. (1975), caregivers are asked to withdraw from the dyadic interaction between them and their infant by assuming a 'poker-face' (the so-called still-face), that is, by becoming unresponsive to the infant's communicative expressions. Specifically, caregivers are asked not to smile, touch or talk to their infants for a period of 2–3 minutes. This can be interpreted as a breakdown in shared meaning-making activities (Bruner 1990). Interestingly, infants respond to such a breakdown with a variety of behaviors (e.g., gaze aversion, crying, fidgeting, pick-me-up gestures, or distancing behavior) as well as physiological changes (e.g., changes in skin-conductance, heart rate, or cortisol levels)

that indicate stress and negative affect (e.g., Adamson and Frick 2003; Gunnar and Davis 2003; Haley and Stansbury 2003; Ramsay and Lewis 2003). That is, the breakdown in communication and external regulation via the caregiver's responses to the child invoke a strong distress response on the part of the infant and result in attempts at reinitiating the shared activity and a negative emotional response when these attempts fail.

What we can take away from these findings is that the child learns how to make sense of their world via numerous, affect-laden social interactions. This implies that their understanding of the situation they find themselves in—including the ways in which they respond emotionally to the situation at hand—is always at the same time an understanding of the social norms of their community. Seen in this light, our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world around us is the result of being initiated into a practice enabling us to navigate and feel at home in the normatively structured social world (McGeer 2007).

This process, which begins at the prelinguistic, preconceptual, and implicit level is later expanded through the child's initiation into language. With the acquisition of language, "[t]he child's actions take on meaning because of the role they are accorded in the language game. This scaffolds the child's gradual mastery of those actions as acts of meaning […]" (Bakhurst 2015, 310). This means that by learning a language, and in particular by acquiring the vocabulary of folk psychology, the child learns to give explanations of their own and other's behavior by citing their reasons, desires, beliefs, intentions, emotions, motivations, etc. In so doing, it enters the socially constituted normative "space of reasons" (Sellars 1956). For example, a belief can be true or false, justified, or unjustified. An emotion can be appropriate or inappropriate. Different mental states can be compatible or incompatible with one another. Hence, as Sellars puts it, "in characterizing an episode or a state of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of the episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1956, 159). That is to say that by ascribing, say, a state of knowing to oneself or to others, one expresses certain commitments to the norms of rationality and hence one becomes answerable to these standards. For example, in claiming to know something, I am implicitly endorsing the content of my claim and, if challenged, I

need to be prepared to provide evidence and reasons for this endorsement. So, acquiring a language and learning to interpret one's own and others' actions in the terms of folk psychology entails entry into what Brandom (1994) calls the "game of giving and asking for reasons."

As such, second-personal interactions provide the foundation for self-conscious, in the sense of reasons-responsive, thought and action. As Baier puts it: "The standards by which our actions are judged are, like the standards by which thought is judged, interpersonal, and learned from others (Baier 1985, 90)." In learning these standards—or, to put it differently, in acquiring the skills of playing the game of giving and asking for reasons—one also acquires the ability to take a higher-order, evaluative attitude towards one's first-order mental states. One can realize, for example, that one's beliefs are incompatible with one another or that a certain desire is inappropriate. As we have seen in the introduction, the ability to take such a higher-order order attitude, that is to ask questions of the kind 'What should I believe, want, do, etc.?', in other words, to take a stance towards oneself and one's interactions with the world, is what constitutes reasons-responsive, responsible agency.

Crucially, again, emotions play a central role in the process of learning the standards of reasoning about oneself in this way and to take responsibility for one's actions. Not only are our emotional responses themselves subject to assessment in terms of their appropriateness or fittingness, but, as Baier points out: "The capacity for responsible action grows as we learn to receive and give reproaches, such as 'But you said you would do it!'" (Baier 1985, 90). Notice that reproaches such as this are never uttered in a neutral way. Rather, they contain elements of what Strawson (1962) calls the "reactive attitudes," for instance outrage, indignation, or disappointment and which are communicated in different ways, including one's tone of voice, one's posture and gestures, or one's facial expressions. Beings who are sensitive to the expression of such reactive attitudes, as most humans are, will in turn respond with emotions such as shame or guilt, or, in the case where we feel unjustly accused, with indignation on the part of the recipient. This, in turn, will lead to specific reactions, such as apologizing, with the expectation that this will result in positive reactive attitudes and hence restore the goodwill on the part of the addressee. Thus, social interactions of this kind set in motion "trajectories of reactive

exchange" (McGeer 2017). Importantly, as McGeer points out, reproaches of this kind are only reasonably directed at beings that we can take to be responsive to them. And they will only receive uptake in beings that are indeed sensitive to such regulative interventions.

6.3   Mindshaping and Agency: A Double-Edged Sword

The general picture of human agency that is suggested in this view is one where agency attributions, both to others and to oneself, are to be understood in normative terms. They can only be meaningfully uttered within the shared framework of a common language and based on having acquired the skills of navigating the normatively shaped space of social interaction. This kind of picture has recently been articulated in the so-called mindshaping view of human social cognition (e.g., Mameli 2001; McGeer 2001, 2007, 2017, 2021; Zawidzki 2013). McGeer paints this picture in the following way: "The central insight of the mindshaping view is that agents learn to become well-behaved folk-psychological agents, shaping their thought and action to conform to the locally relevant norms of recognizable kind-and-context-appropriate agency (where kinds of agents may be differentiated along any number of dimensions: gender, class, role, and so on)" (McGeer 2021, 1058). Thus, the mindshaping view, which has been proposed as an alternative to the standard conception of folk psychology, emphasizes the regulative dimension of folk psychological attributions of agency. On the standard picture, folk psychology primarily serves the function of predicting and explaining others' behavior for the purposes of social coordination. In contrast, while the mindshaping approach does not deny that we can often explain and predict others' behavior, the claim is that this is not the principal function of folk-psychology. Rather, as we have seen, by ascribing mental states to others (or to ourselves) we are placing them in the normative space of reasons. Hence, in introducing children to our folk psychological practices we are providing them with a framework for understanding themselves and others, that is of interpreting others and making

themselves interpretable in turn, according to the social norms of our community.[2]

As we have seen in Sect. 6.2, the process of interpreting and making ourselves interpretable begins prior to the onset of language and involves a variety of mechanisms of affective social learning. It finds its continuation and becomes more sophisticated with the acquisition of language and its manifold ways of making sense of oneself, one another and of the surrounding world. As a result, over the course of normal development, children are "bootstrapped" into regulating and interpreting their own experiences, emotions, thoughts, and actions in accord with the intersubjective norms of their societies (McGeer 2001). Crucially, it is our sensitivity to the expressed emotions of another and our response to them that provides these mechanisms with their special normative force. On the one hand, our receptivity to the emotional expressions of others in situations of uncertainty allows us to learn about the values that our social community attaches to different objects, events, and persons and to align our own evaluative responses with the values of our community. On the other hand, our sensitivity towards the regulative interventions directed at us also serves to establish in us ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are in line with the norms of our community and to bring our thoughts and behaviors 'back in line' when they stray from the normative order of our community.

If this view is correct, it suggests a "proleptic account of agency" as socially acquired, namely, via the affective engagement with others (McGeer 2017). The central claim of such an account is that it is because we take each other to be agents that are answerable to reasons—and because we are sensitive to the relevant reactive attitudes (i.e., because we

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[2] The mindshaping view possesses several advantages compared to the standard conception of folk psychology. For instance, it possesses the advantage of being better able to account for our "reactive responsiveness" when it comes to the ascription of mental states to others as well as for our first-person authority with regard to our self-ascription of mental states (McGeer 2015). Moreover, it connects with evolutionary considerations on the grounds that we could not have evolved to become proficient mindreaders if we had not first evolved to become mindshapers. As Zawidzki puts it, "Inferring another's propositional attitudes based on her behavior is a computationally intractable task, unless she has already been shaped to be cooperative and easily interpretable" (Zawidzki 2013, 28). In this view, it is due to our need and desire for social cooperation and the resultant development of a norm psychology (cf. Chudek and Henrich 2011) that we aim to make ourselves interpretable to others.

have the disposition to learn from the regulative interventions of others)—that we indeed are such agents. For it is via the socially regulated initiation into our folk psychological practices of meaning-making that we learn to produce thought and action that is compliant with the intersubjective norms of reasons-responsiveness. Accordingly, socialization enables agency in the sense of reasons-responsiveness. And, as we have seen, emotions play a crucial role in this process.

However, socialization does not only enable, but it can also limit autonomous agency. This is because, as we have seen in the quote by McGeer, kinds of agents may be differentiated along several dimensions, such as gender, class, and social role, and human societies are usually organized in ways that privilege certain social groups over others. Hence, the social norms of our societies are often such that they hinder both the development and exercise of autonomy for certain social groups. Consider the case of gender. As Haslanger points out, ascribing gender to infants imposes a number of norms and expectations that "give rise to different patterns of gendered behavior, experience, and self-understanding" (Haslanger 2019, 12). This is because ascribing gender involves implicit expectations regarding the behavior of people belonging to this gender. For example, girls and women are often expected to be more empathic, more quiet, less physically active, less talented in certain academic areas (such as math or physics), and more accommodating to the needs of others compared to boys and men. These expectations are often mirrored in the ways in which girls and women come to not only behave, but, more crucially, to experience and understand themselves, giving rise to "expectancy effects" (i.e., self-fulfilling prophecies; see Mameli 2001; Haslanger 2019). And the same holds for other dimensions, such as class or social roles.

To illustrate, consider the case of Felicity Porcelline, one of the central protagonists in Kate Grenville's novel *The Idea of Perfection* (Grenville 1999), which is discussed in Mackenzie (2002). Felicity, as she is being portrayed by Mackenzie, strives for perfection as a woman, a wife, and a mother. She admires her own attractiveness, goes to great lengths to maintain it, feels proud of her domestic skills and her marriage, and is grateful for having risen above her family background, even if at times she senses a feeling of disconnect towards her husband and son (which

she dismisses) and even begins an affair (which, she claims, is not really her doing). The values she endorses seem to be guided by norms that are extreme versions of the norms of traditional feminine gender socialisation. As Mackenzie puts it, Felicity is more like a caricature of femininity than a genuine agent. The problem seems to be that her commitments betray an uncritical acceptance of various social norms, such as the norms of gender, sexuality, and class. As a result, while her beliefs and actions reflect the norms of her society (and in that sense are sensitive to the reasons embodied by her social group), they do not seem to reflect what she herself truly values, and so do not reflect sensitivity to her reasons, thereby undermining her agency. That there might be a disconnect between the norms she explicitly subscribes to, and her genuine values become apparent when we consider some of her feelings (e.g., the feeling of disconnect with regard to her husband and child or the lack of genuine contentment with her life, despite her professed pride in her accomplishments).

One obvious response to this might be that the solution to this problem lies in the capacity to engage in critical reflection. If Felicity's inability to exercise genuine agency is due to an uncritical acceptance of social norms, she needs to engage in a critical questioning of these norms to gain true agency. The emphasis on critical reflection certainly has a long tradition in philosophy. For instance, prominent hierarchical theories of autonomy, such as Watsons (1975) distinguish between first-order motivations, that is, the motivations that an agent unreflectively finds herself with, and higher-order identifications that the agent endorses upon critical reflection. In Watson's view, agents act autonomously if their first-order motivations are integrated with their higher-order reflective stance.

However, as several authors have pointed out, critical reflection alone will not do, because socialization operates at different levels, including the level of critical reflection (Thalberg 1978; Friedman 1986; Mackenzie 2002). As Mackenzie points out: "[…] an agent's identifications or values are themselves subject to socialization. For what ensures that an agent's identifications or values have been scrutinized in the right way? And what ensures that an agent's capacities for critical reflection are not themselves scrutinized by her socialization? Furthermore, why assume that an agent's identifications, or her endorsed values and principles, genuinely reflect what she really values or wants?" (Mackenzie 2002, 190)

Because of this, we cannot be sure that even the norms and values that a person endorses upon critical reflection reflect their autonomous agency. In the case of Felicity, not only do her current, explicit endorsements reflect an uncritical acceptance of societal norms, but we can also expect that even if she were to engage in critical reflection, she would still hold on to these norms, not just because she would be sanctioned if she were to depart from them, but, more importantly, because they are so ingrained into her self-conception. What's more, she might even display strong resistance to a critical view that threatens to question her identification with these norms (Mackenzie 2002). This is not to deny that critical reflection plays an important role in developing and exercising reasons-responsiveness. But it is to say that in addition to critical reflection, we need to consider other skills and abilities that, taken together, constitute what Diana Meyers (1989) calls "autonomy competence."

6.4   The Epistemic Role of Emotions

Here, following authors such as Mackenzie (2002), Jones (2003), and Tappolet (2016), I want to focus on the role of emotions for the exercise of autonomous agency. I will argue that emotional skills are an important component of autonomy competence.[3] In a nutshell, this is because emotions can provide us with important insights into the nature of the situations we find ourselves in, relative to what really matters to us, and help us to gain self-knowledge with respect to our values and reasons. Moreover, appropriately developed emotional abilities (including meta-affective skills) are necessary to acquire new evaluative frameworks and to break free of agency-undermining habits.

Generally speaking, we can regard emotions in terms of "cognitive frameworks that structure our perceptions of the world, particularly the

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[3] This is not to say that autonomy competence does not include other components as well, in addition to the emotional, social, and reflective skills that will be the focus of the following discussion. For instance, Mackenzie (2000) argues that our skills of imagistic representation play an important role for autonomy, and Benson (1994) argues that autonomous agency relies on having a "sense of self-worth." Notice, however, that both imagination and our sense of self-worth derive part of their power from their affective force.

social world" (Mackenzie 2002, p. 194). They frame our understanding of the practical situations we find ourselves in by directing our attention to certain features of the situation, thereby making them more salient than others. As de Sousa puts it: "emotions are determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies" (de Sousa 1987, 137; quoted in Mackenzie 2002, 194). In so doing, emotions indicate to us which aspects of a situation are relevant to us, relative to our concerns, goals, ambitions, and values. In other words, they involve appraisals of how the world is relative to what we value; emotions "therefore reflect what matters to us, what we care about and find significant" (Mullin 2011, 96).[4] Thus, quite apart from standing in opposition to reasons-responsiveness, emotions can be seen as a source of our practical reasons (de Sousa 1987; Jones 2003; Mackenzie 2002; Tappolet 2016).

Importantly, they do so even when what we care about or find significant is not something we consciously realize or can admit to ourselves (Mullin 2011). In fact, as has regularly been pointed out in the relevant literature, particularly in the feminist literature, it is often precisely the emotions that do not cohere with our explicitly endorsed values and commitments and that we therefore dismiss as being groundless, that can make us aware of our reasons and motivate us to critically question dominant ideologies (e.g., Jaggar 1996; Bennett 1974; Arpaly 2000; Jones 2003). Hence, so-called "outlaw emotions", that is, emotions that stand in conflict with an agent's wider belief system, are sometimes claimed to be of particular epistemic value, especially under conditions of structural oppression (Silva 2021).

This can be illustrated again with the case of Felicity. On the face of it, Felicity's self-conception is fully in line with the stereotyped norms of gender and sexuality. However, the fact that she experiences a sense of emotional disconnect with respect to her husband and son, the fact that

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[4] There is much debate in the literature on how exactly they do this. According to perceptual accounts (e.g., De Sousa 1987; Tappolet 2016) emotions are perceptions of evaluative properties. In contrast, others regard them as evaluative beliefs or judgments (e.g., Nussbaum 1994; Solomon 1993). A third approach holds that emotions should not be analyzed in terms of either perception-like or judgment-like attitudes. Rather, emotions, on this view, are different types of attitudes that can be analyzed in terms of felt action tendencies (Deonna and Teroni 2012). Though I have sympathies for the third view, I will not delve into this debate here.

she finds herself desiring another man, or the fact that her well-cared-for appearance and her clean house do not seem to truly fill her with contentment reveal a rupture between her explicitly endorsed values and the things she truly cares about. Though she is not yet able to admit this to herself, presumably because it conflicts both with the judgments of society and with her self-conception, her emotional response to the situation she finds herself in nevertheless possesses the potential to reveal to her what really matters to her. As Mackenzie puts it: "Thoroughly socialised agents may reflectively endorse their socially acquired identifications or values, but this reflective endorsement provides no guarantee that they are autonomous. In fact, in such contexts, as in the case of Felicity Porcelline, those lower-level motivations that the agent regards as wayward, or even disowns, may provide a better indication of what she really wants or values" (Mackenzie 2002, 190). Thus, if Felicity were to pay attention to these emotional cues, they might just take her on a path to discovering her true values.

Another potent example from literature is the case of Tambudzai, the protagonist in Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel *Nervous Conditions* (Dangaremba 2004). The novel is set in Umtali, in the former Southern Rhodesia during the 1960s and 1970s and traces the journey from childhood into adolescence of Tambudzai (the story's narrator) and her cousin Nyasha. Tambudzai comes from a community that is steeped in a long-standing patriarchal and agricultural tradition. As such, the dominant attitudes towards girls and women in her community entail that, in contrast to boys, girls do not need to be formally educated, as their place is in the home, where they are to look after the needs of the family. Tambudzai, who is both academically very talented and extremely driven, experiences this as deeply unfair and develops very strong feelings of anger and resentment towards her immediate family (while experiencing gratitude and admiration towards her Westernized uncle, who ultimately invites her to live in his house at the mission and to attend the mission school that he directs). Yet these emotions bring her into a deep conflict with the values she is raised with and her accompanying self-conception, initially causing her to dismiss and attempt to repress her feelings. Nevertheless, her emotions are indicative of the unjust social circumstances she finds herself in

and ultimately propel her to break out of the narrow existence her parents have chosen.[5]

A third example that is frequently discussed in the literature is the example of Mark Twain's character Huckleberry Finn (Twain 1994). When Huckleberry Finn refuses to denounce Jim to the slave hunters, despite his judgment that this is what he ought to do, due to the feelings of respect, empathy and admiration that he has developed towards his friend, he acts not only in the morally right way, but we think that this decision also reflects on his "true self" in the sense of his true values (cf. Tappolet 2016).

As these examples illustrate, emotions have the potential to promote our evaluative understanding of ourselves vis-à-vis the situations we are confronted with, even, or perhaps especially, when they go against our rational judgments. This includes an understanding of others and our relation to them as well as our place in society at large, revealing injustices and biases that we are so often socialised into and that therefore seem 'reasonable' to us. Emotions can therefore play an important role for self-knowledge and self-development, in particular with respect to the development of agency. This seems to be the case especially for agents that suffer from conditions of oppression. This is because, as feminist philosophers have pointed out, under conditions of oppression reasoning tends to favor oppressive beliefs, so that outlaw emotions enable agents that suffer from oppression to track reasons they may otherwise not have tracked (e.g., Friedmann 1986; Jaggar 1989; Silva 2021).

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[5] Of course, this is not to deny that the formal schooling that Tambudzai, alongside her cousin, ultimately receives causes real dilemmas, as it alienates them from their native community. Part of what makes Dangaremba's novel such a powerful read is that is presents us with the multifaceted problems and conflicts associated with growing up under conditions of patriarchy and colonialism and the liberating as well as impeding effects of deracination and biculturalism, in particular regarding girls. For further discussion, see, for example, Gorle (1997).

6.5 Cultivating Agentive Skills: The Role of Reflection, Emotional Flexibility, and Affective Disruptability

However, just as emotions can lead us on a path towards self-discovery and agency, they can also skew our interpretation of situations and lead to distorted reasoning, preventing us from seeing relevant aspects of the situation that are not in line with the interpretative framework they provide. It is no coincidence that the emotions are often seen as standing in opposition to our reasons-responsiveness, and we certainly cannot simply take them at face value. For example, my feeling of anger towards my partner during a heated argument will draw my attention to those aspects of his behavior that reinforce my emotional reaction, while preventing me from appreciating his side of the story. So, while emotions can sometimes track and help us become aware of our reasons, they also often fail to do so. This problem becomes particularly salient if we recall the lessons from the first part of this chapter. There we have seen how the sociocultural meaning of emotions becomes grafted onto our individual ways of appraising the world via processes of learning how to navigate our normatively structured social world. In a society that is ripe with biases, stereotypes, and social injustices, some of the emotional frames that we acquire during this process will inevitably be distorting in the sense of reflecting just these problematic ways of evaluating others and ourselves. Given the processes of norm internalization sketched earlier, these problematic frameworks are acquired and reflected in the emotional responses of members of oppressed as well as socially dominant groups. Accordingly, even victims of oppression are likely to have emotional responses that are in line with dominant ideology as well as those that are in conflict with prevailing social norms. Thus, Felicity Porcellaine does indeed experience pride in her accomplishments as a wife and mother and, likewise, Tambudzai feels genuinely proud when she is praised by her family member for her efficiency in helping with the food

preparations for a large family gathering. So how can agents tell whether to trust or distrust their emotions?[6]

Following Jones (2003) and Tappolet (2016), I suggest that to address this problem, we need to engage in an ongoing cultivation and exercise of what Tappolet calls "agential virtues" and what Meyers (1989) calls skills of "autonomy competence." Both Jones and Tappolet, despite their emphasis on the epistemic role of the emotions, see the relevant skills primarily in the ability for reflective self-monitoring: on their view, we can trust our emotions insofar as we don't have reason to think that they fail to be reliable, and it is through reflective self-monitoring that we learn to recognize reasons to be doubtful of the reliability of our emotions. In cases where we do have reason to question the reliability of our emotions, we need to discount them. This seems right, as far as it goes. For example, on the one hand, through reflecting on the anger she experiences towards her parents and her brother, over time Tambudzai comes to realize that her emotion is revealing the injustice of her status as a woman in the family and in society at large. On the other hand, the initially uncritical sense of gratitude and admiration she feels towards her uncle become relativized when she begins to reflect on the problematic interactions between him and her aunt and cousin that she observes while living in their home. Likewise, her incredulity and even disgust at the behavior shown by her cousin Nyasha, who, having been raised in England for some years, returns with radically different ideas and behaviors compared to those Tambudzai was raised with, appears in a new light once she gets to know her better and has the chance to engage in regular conversation with her. Thus, Tambudzai learns to probe her emotions and to critically examine them under the light of her new experiences and ways of thinking.

However, it is important to realize that reflective self-monitoring can only take us so far. Indeed, it is often only by turning towards others that we come to see our emotional reactions and the resulting beliefs and decisions as right or wrong. Hence, Tambudzai spends long nights

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[6] This is one reason to be skeptical of the perceptual model of the emotions. As Brady (2013) points out, in contrast to perceptions, emotions do not justify our evaluative judgments; rather they should be seen as invitations to search for such justifications.

with her cousin Nyasha discussing their different views of what happened the day before and their different perspectives on their family and society—including their stance towards the missionaries who educate them (and whom Tambudzai looks up to, while Nyasha is able to see more clearly the pernicious effects of their education). It is only through these discussions that she gains a better understanding of herself and the world she finds herself in. Thus, rather than striving for self-transparency in self-monitoring, which will remain elusive, we should recognize the importance of social interaction in developing our meta-affective skills.

Yet our ability to engage in critical reflection alone—even when undertaken with others—as such will not be sufficient, since, as Mackenzie points out, some standing emotions or emotional dispositions can be so deeply ingrained in a person's character and patterns of response that they become inert and may even lead to resistance to critical reflection.[7]

> […] if our emotional schemas guide our perceptions and are the source of our reasons, then a shift in our understanding of reasons for action requires, at the very least, sufficient emotional flexibility to be able to consider alternative options. Sometimes it may require a more radical shift in our emotional schemas. For unless we can see alternative reasons as reasons, they will not be salient to us. (Mackenzie 2002, 203)

Thus, what we need in addition to critical reflection, according to Mackenzie, is emotional flexibility, that is, we need to be able to effect change in our frameworks of perception. This, in turn, requires affective experiences that allow us to gain access to other ways of seeing the world.

Arguably, outlaw emotions provide just that – new ways of seeing the world by offering us new interpretative frameworks. As Jaggar writes: "As well as motivating critical research, outlaw emotions may also enable us to perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions" (1989, 167). Moreover, as we saw earlier, when it comes to agency under conditions of structural injustice, outlaw emotions might

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[7] Similarly, von Maur (2021) argues that due to the "habitual dimension of affective intentionality," that is, the emotion repertoire that a person acquires over the course of their upbringing, agents are prone to put an unquestioned faith in their familiar appraisals.

be of particular epistemic value, for they can enable victims of oppression to recognize and challenge social norms that limit their autonomy. Not only can they motivate agents to critically assess their current belief system, but, as Silva (2021) has argued, when it comes to agents who suffer from oppression, outlaw emotions and the beliefs they give rise to are generally more reliable than emotional responses that are in line with dominant ideology, for "outlaw emotions are sensitive to reasons that oppressed agents are in a privileged positions to access" (Silva 2021, p. 684). Interestingly, she holds that outlaw emotions are not more reliable in virtue of the processes that generate them, for those processes do not distinguish between emotions that are in opposition to prevailing ideology and those that are not. Rather, in her view, "outlaw beliefs are more reliable because they have propositional content that is more likely to feature in the beliefs of those who occupy a position of epistemic privilege relative to that domain" (p. 686). Thus, it appears that such emotions should be given specific epistemic weight when it comes to assessing whether to trust or distrust our affective responses.

Again, notice that emotional encounters with others can play an important role in providing us with new ways of perceiving the world ('through their eyes', as it were). Thus, it is precisely by developing feelings of friendship towards Jim that Huck Finn is able to overcome his racist socialization. And it is by experiencing deep empathy with Nyasha that Tambudzai comes to question her own perspective. Such encounters with others are all the more important because agents are often unaware of their position of epistemic privilege (as well as of their epistemic blind spots). Thus, it will often only be through an exchange with others, rather than through introspection, that we can gain insight into our epistemic position. However, notice that the experience of "outlaw emotions" will often lead to a strong sense of discomfort, especially if they threaten our self-conception and disrupt our habitual ways of navigating the (social) world. Accordingly, throughout the novel, Tambudzai is time and again thrown into a deep conflict between her occurrent emotions and what they seem to reveal to her, and the values and self-conception she was socialized into (with the accompanying emotional schemata). This, in turn, will often lead to resistance, resulting in attempts to suppress or dismiss the relevant emotions. Yet while the experience of disruption can,

and often will, lead to resistance, it can also, as von Maur (2021) points out, allow for an openness towards other ways of seeing the world that cannot be achieved through reasoning alone, thereby conferring important epistemic benefits. Accordingly, in her view, it is important to cultivate a pluralistic emotions repertoire, flexible affectivity, and, crucially, openness to "affective disruptability".[8]

To foster such an openness, we need sociocultural practices that allow agents to explore a range of alternative ways of seeing the world. In other words, we need to find ways to cultivate emotional flexibility, as well as meta-affective skills. In addition to affective encounters with specific others, this might also be achieved, for instance, via an engagement with a broad range of works of literature, art, or film (Mackenzie 2002).[9]

6.6   Conclusion

Our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world around us is the result of social interactions. These interactions are affect-laden and possess normative import. The fact that we are susceptible to normatively structured affective interactions with others ensures that we are able to cooperate with and make ourselves be understood and interpretable by others. As a result, we become reasons-responsive by being initiated into the social space of reasons. This, in turn, makes us into responsible agents—both in terms of epistemic as well as practical agency. However, this same fact also makes us susceptible to agency-undermining social practices. Yet, to recognize and combat these, again, it is important to turn to our emotions. Emotions can reveal to us to the things we value, even if we are not aware of them yet, as well as alert us to structural injustices. Thus, if we want to understand the nature of autonomous agency and contribute to the question of how such agency can be developed and

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[8] This is one reason to think that emotions, such as anger, bitterness, resentment, paranoia, or hypersensitivity, that are usually disparaged due to their disruptive force might sometimes be necessary for facilitating moral insight into entrenched injustices, as Meyers (1997) suggests.

[9] In line with this, Mullin (2011) suggests that reading and emotionally responding to certain kinds of narratives, particularly when we discuss our emotional responses with others, can be an important resource for developing meta-affective skills.

fostered, we need to take into account the role of emotions in shaping our agency. Importantly, though, we cannot take our emotions at face value; rather, we should see them as an invitation to further investigate the situation as it is being presented to us. Crucially, any such investigation will again, rely on social practices that allow us to gain the required skills for critical reflection, on the one hand, and for emotional flexibility and disruptability on the other. Thus, the solution to the problem of agency-undermining social practices should not be sought in introspection; rather we ought to ask how we can cultivate those social and cultural practices that allow agents to develop emotional flexibility and the ability to forge new pathways for themselves by seeing the world from different perspectives.[10]

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