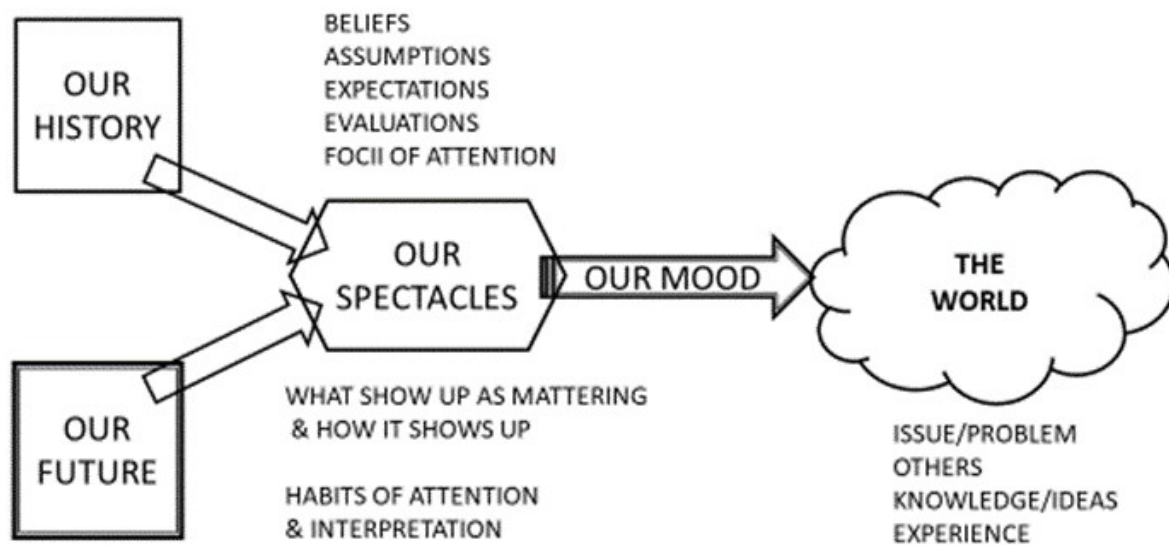


Emotions – P 14.1



Emotions are often viewed as impediments to rational judgement. It is often said that emotions 'cloud' one's judgement – that they hinder reasonable evaluations, and the making of good choices. This is, for sure, true at times – but without emotions we would not have the motivation to judge - for to judge is to 'care' enough to take responsibility, to choose to choose, and not to act in habit or by rule.

It is how we 'feel' about things that motivates us to choose and to act. The dispositions & capabilities that constitute practical wisdom enable sound judgment, but they do not motivate us to judge, or to 'care' about the quality of our judging and the impact of our choices. Our dispositions & capabilities enable our navigating of the permanent white water of the wicked world, but it is our emotions that motivate us for the challenge.

Our wisdom helps us set a course for our destination, and sail the seas we face on route, but it is our emotions that will get us to our destination. Without emotions our ship would not even have left harbour, as we would not have 'cared' that we were not where we wanted to be, or having the impact that we wished to have!

Practical Wisdom can do nothing by itself – it must be combined with a desire, a motivation, to act. Without the driving force of emotion, of 'care', there would be no human endeavours of substance.

As human beings we are 'always in a mood' of some form – we are creatures of emotion. These emotions provide our motivations, but they also modulate our attention in, and colour our interpretations of, the world we 'see'; and our moods do not only influence how we see the world today, they also influence how we currently 'see' the past, and they mould the futures that we can imagine.

When we judge, reflect & project, we do so from within our current mood. But our current emotional state can itself be driven by the past that we recall [we can be discouraged, embarrassed, guilty, regretful etc.] and the futures that we imagine [we can be fearful, excited, anxious etc.]. Our emotional state is also influenced by what we believe the world should become/what the future should look like compared to what we see as being the current situation – we can be daunted by the task of change we seemingly face, or possibly exhilarated by its challenge.

We see the world through the spectacles that we have acquired in our lived experience, but the field of view, colour and shade of these spectacles is highly contingent upon our current mood – whatever

its cause. These causes can often be seemingly trivial and incidental to one's focal concerns, and the primary task in hand. Even the weather can have an impact!

On route to an important meeting with your boss you may be unavoidably delayed, she is a stickler for punctuality, and you know she is on a tight schedule – stress is our normal human animal response. Even when we know, that in the end, this is a trivial issue, in the context of the detailed cause - dealing with your very troubled anorexic teenager, and getting her safely to school! If the cause of your delay had been a fatal traffic accident that you had witnessed, and had almost been involved in, that stress about being late would probably not have arisen, or have evaporated fast. However, the impact of dramatic experiences, such as the latter one, on our emotional states can be highly significant, and they can modulate our emotional response to events, and colour the way we come to 'see' things, to a very great degree, and maybe for a very long time. The bright lights of emotionally impactful events can affect our 'vision' for quite a while; if they are bright enough our vision can become stubbornly different.

Emotional responses can also be deliberately provoked by others, and we, can evoke those of others. It is often said that reason may persuade people, but that it is emotion that moves them, and it is the central talent of the great orator to combine logos and pathos in the making of an argument, and in the capturing of support for a certain course of action. We must be wary of this, as the threat of evoked emotions skewing our judgements is ever present. It is hard to maintain the quality of our judgement when our emotions have been ignited. Both Churchill and Hitler were masters of the rhetorical art! The skill of rhetoric is like a chisel – it is amoral. With it you can craft beautiful things, but you can also kill with it – in the 'wrong' hands this tool is dangerous. If we ourselves become skilled in the rhetorical evoking of emotions in the making of arguments for our ends, means and beginnings we must be mindful of the power we have to 'move' people against their 'better' judgement – it is not in our best interests to do so!

Our emotional response to the circumstances we face originates in our basic animal instincts - these are neuro-physiologically hardwired and biochemically powered. The prejudices & practices that we have acquired through our lived experience are not so bodily embedded. Our reflexive struggle with the windows of our 'house of habits' is a very difficult and relentless task – but 'getting to grips' with our emotional responses is even tougher. These can be truly instantaneous – the habit of hesitation we seek in our reflexive pursuit may have great traction on our prejudices & practices, but our bodily emotional response is stepping on the gas, before we can even apply our reflexive brakes. Our reflexive hesitation has to take place in the context of, and often despite, our current mood and immediate emotional responses – the origins of which often rest well outside the precise circumstance in which we are engaged!

Understanding all that we have now discussed, the wise one strives for equanimity, and exercises emotional discipline in the pursuit of good judgement.

To have equanimity is to have a resilience of mind. But it is not a state we have, or can acquire - just like reflexivity it is a striving. We are always in a mood, and events may perturb or excite us, but we must be watchful, and know, that though our emotional responses are strong, their gaining a foothold in our minds requires our cognitive compliance. We gain equanimity when we are watchful of ourselves; alert to the seeds of an emotional response germinating within ourselves and noticing their growth - giving ourselves the opportunity to suppress or cultivate them. Emotions are a choice, and again we must choose to choose if we are to found our judgements well – the wise one is always be in the mood for choosing!

As Oscar Wilde said - *we must not be at the mercy of our emotions, we must use them, and dominate them.*