

# Hyponoetics

## Philosophical Essays

### Reason and Passion



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Since the emergence of reason out of the obscurity of mythology with the early Greek philosophers, the struggle and antagonism between the irresistible forces of rationality (logos) and the atavistic forces of passion (pathos) have been the subject of innumerable deliberations. Why do we experience this rupture within our nature as unnatural? Why do passions pull us down to the level of the instinctual and primordial, whereas reason lifts us up to the level of human dignity and freedom? Is this eternal conflict of mind over matter, of freedom versus necessity, part of our essence as human beings or a self-inflicted dualism that makes our lives miserable and entangles us in continual suffering?

That the dualism between passion and reason is simplistic is demonstrated by the fact that within the realm of passions there are obviously countless variations and degrees of manifestation that in themselves posit nested antagonisms and oppositions. For example, love and hatred. Both are considered emotions, but love is creative and constructive, whereas hatred is destructive. I'm not just talking of the opposites of good and bad. This is a moral judgment and I'm trying to abstract from morality in this discussion and look at the nature of mind in a more objective, metaphysical manner. I do not mean to say that love is good and hatred is bad. This is a naïve realism that I don't advocate at all.

Stepping outside the boundary of morality, what is the nature of love and hatred? First of all, we have to understand that both emotions cannot be conceived and experienced by themselves but only in relation to each other. There are two kinds of relations between opposing emotions. The positive relation is one of sublation (to use Hegel's term) or canceling each other out in a higher unity out of which both emotions emerge in our mind. The negative relation is one of negative determination. For example, love is everything that hatred is not. We can determine love's qualities by limiting it from other emotions, what is called intension in logic, or by the special difference (see Aristotle's *differentia specifica*). It is important to understand that love has the qualities it has only because of its opposite, hate, and hate is only the opposite of love because we know what love is. We cannot experience love without the notion of hate. Both emotions are determined through each other, as an absolute negation of each other. Emotions, therefore, are their own negations, are existentially absurd and irrational. This irrational nature is what puts them in conflict with reason and rationality.

Reason is the use of thinking without the subjectivity of emotions. Reason is pure objectivity, passion is pure subjectivity. Reason transcends our self and finds itself in the universality of thought, whereas passion is bound by necessity and by nature to a concrete individual being in which it expresses itself in the pure experience of subjectivity. On further analysis, however, we can see a similar antagonistic pattern in thought as well. From the point of view of concepts, we have a similar dualism: concepts occur in opposites, such as freedom and necessity. But even a more concrete concept, such as tree, is not without negative determinations. As Spinoza aptly remarked, all determination involves a negation.

Thinking negates itself as much as feeling does. It's all about self-determination which is nothing else than the finite limiting itself against another finite. The definition of finite includes differentiation, and differentiation is self-negation. The process of negation produces the dynamics of evolution and of change.

Emotions are powerful forces in our mind that tend to eliminate rational thinking or at least debilitate it to the extent that when we act out of emotional influence we are not, at the same time, thinking rationally. Why does emotion conflict with reason? It has partially to do with intentionality. The object of emotion is not always the same as that of reason. The object of an emotion is determined by the universality of the emotion. The more universal an emotion is, the more it harmonizes with the intentional objects of reason. Reason is pure universality, whereas emotion is pure particularity. The more particular or concrete an emotional object is, the more it tends to limit its scope of efficacy and thereby creating an environment of antagonistic forces, because the emotion's intensionality is very narrow and therefore enters into negation with a greater number of other similar emotional objects either within the same mind or with emotional objects of other minds, thereby increasing the chances of conflict. The wider the object of intentionality, the more universal the emotion, and the fewer are the antagonisms. Particular emotions are usually transient emotions in a very delicate system of balance. Particular emotions are not stable but subject to constant change and fluctuations. Universality adds stability and equilibrium to a system, be that an emotional system such as the psyche, or artificial systems such as economy or the state.

To return to our example of love. Love as a concrete emotion has also a concrete intentional object, such as a specific person or a specific object. In that state, love's attention span is vulnerable to external influences of all kinds. Love of such a particular kind rises and falls with its object and sometimes just with a change in the object itself. If the loved person changes or doesn't live up to love's concrete expectations, love itself crumbles. Although we tend to blame the object and not our emotion, the problem evidently lies in the narrow intentionality of love's object. By universalizing love, and thereby also removing the dependency of love on a particular object to a more extensive region of efficacy, love becomes a more permanent, more comprehensive, and nobler emotion with less inclinations to conflict.

As we have seen, approximating emotion to universality, emotion becomes more like reason. This is emotion's contribution to a unity of mind, a unity of emotion and reason. What is reason's contribution? Similarly, reason's universality needs to become more concrete, needs to step out of the ivory tower of abstraction, logic, and objectivity and become more subjective, without losing itself in subjectivity, becoming more concrete, without giving up the power of abstract thinking. What we need are "concrete concepts" or "concrete universality" to use Hegel's term, that is, concepts that are in contact with experience, not completely without content. Concepts are not completely different from their sensory counterparts that they represent. By meeting emotion's aspiration to universality midway, reason contributes to the stability of the noetic system of our mind which includes both parts, passion and reason. By elevating passion to the level of reason and by removing reason from its haughty throne of absolute objectivity, both can finally find some common ground on which conflict ends or is minimal. The insuperable gap between emotion and reason can finally be bridged by these two movements of thought: universalizing emotion and particularizing reason.

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