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Sentimentality as an Ethical and Aesthetic Fault

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ABSTRACT. Robert Solomon has defended that there is nothing wrong with sentimentality, and that it should be defined minimally as the “expression of and appeal to tender feelings”. Against Solomon’s proposal, this paper defends a conception of sentimentality along the lines of the standard view, as a moral and aesthetic fault. I claim that sentimentality is a form of emotional self-deception linked to untrue expression. First, I defend that the sentimentalist fabricates certain feelings by expressing them; and second, that he is deceived about his own emotions.

*To be called sentimental is to be ridiculed or dismissed.
Sentimentality is weakness; it suggests hypocrisy.
Or perhaps it is the fact that
sentimental people are so ... embarrassing.*

(Solomon, 2004, p. 3)

I. The Standard View

Sentimentality is thought to be a tendency to undergo sentimental emotions. And sentimental emotions are considered generally wrong. From an epistemological perspective, sentimental emotions are said to be wrong because unwarranted. Thus, sentimentality is first of all a flaw against truth, because either the belief involved in emotion is false, the feeling

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is directed towards a wrong object, or because the affective response is disproportionate in the circumstances. In the first, qualitative, cases the thought content of the emotion is false, or the feeling is directed towards inadequate objects; therefore, the emotion is deemed unwarranted. In the second, quantitative, case, there is an excess of feeling in relation to the content. So in the overall the emotion is unjustified too.

The standard view attributes to the sentimental person emotional weakness, having the emotion for “its own sake”, indulging and taking pleasure from the emotion, obtaining a self-gratifying image from it, and not acting upon it. The last feature of the sentimental character is found to be the most undesirable consequence of sentimental emotions: their lack of motivational force, therefore the unreliable character of the sentimentalist.¹

In his article “In Defense of Sentimentality” R. Solomon challenged the standard view and proposed instead a “minimal definition” of sentimentality, as “nothing more nor less than ‘an expression of and appeal to tender feelings’”. Consequently, he claimed “...there is nothing wrong with sentimentality.”² According to Solomon, usual criticism against sentimentality is just consequence of philosophical and high culture prejudices against emotions in general, traditionally taken as irrational forces against ethical self-control and aesthetic detachment. Moreover, “It is not a secret that the charge of sentimentalism has long had sexist implications,”³ since

¹ As the famous Wilde’s letter to Alfred Douglas emphasized: “The fact is that you were, and are, I suppose still, a typical sentimentalist. For a sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it. You think that one can have one’s emotions for nothing. One cannot. Even the finest and most self-sacrificing emotions have to be paid for. Strangely enough, that is what makes them fine. The intellectual and emotional life of ordinary people is a very contemptible affair. Just as they borrow their ideas from a sort of circulating library of thought – the *Zeitgeist* of an age that has no soul – and send them back soiled at the end of each week, so they always try to get their emotions on credit, and refuse to pay the bill when it comes in. You should pass out of that conception of life. As soon as you have to pay for an emotion you will know its quality, and be the better for such knowledge. And remember that the sentimentalist is always a cynic at heart. Indeed sentimentality is merely the bank holiday of cynicism”. (Quoted in Tanner, M. (1976-7), “Sentimentality”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 77; p. 95.)

² Solomon, *op. cit.*, 4.

³ Solomon, *op. cit.*, 6.

sentimentality is said of warm and tender affects, such as love, compassion, pity, which tend to be linked to sexist views about women's weakness. While outrage or wrath, male dominant passions, may be qualified as wild or violent, but not sentimental.

Together with the historical and ideological causes of the philosophical virulence against sentimentality, Solomon pointed out the failure of philosophical attempts to define sentimentality. Referring to the epistemological argument, Solomon held that by itself the falsity of the emotional cognitive element does not directly make an emotion inadequate, insofar as the person sensibly believes (have reasons to believe) it. Even though she was clearly mistaken, hers would be a cognitive mistake, but not an emotional one. Solomon pointed to the impossibility of omniscience and the ubiquity of errors also in rational subjects as well. But more to the point, rational subjects' beliefs are often motivated and biased by desires, emotions, and so on, without their motivated nor biased beliefs turning by themselves an emotion inappropriate, still less, sentimental. Besides, Solomon concludes, sentimental emotions may indeed be epistemologically wrong, without being for that reason ethically or aesthetically flawed. And together with the epistemological argument, Solomon challenged the rest of arguments about sentimentality immorality and bad taste.

First, he refused the idea that sentimentality is "emotional weakness". He called it the loaded definition of sentimentality, as it supposes that an excess of emotion weakens.

Second, Solomon pointed that self-indulgence is neither sufficient nor necessary to characterise sentimentality. On the one hand, one of the most invoked charges against the sentimentalist is that he finds pleasure or gratification in undergoing certain emotions. But the truth is that we often indulge in and obtain pleasure from many other emotions: proud of our children, love, or melancholy. Proud specially is directly linked to a gratifying image of one-self, and so is reciprocated love. On the other hand, it is not clear in which sense can negative sentimental emotions be gratifying, and obviously some sentimental emotions, such as unrequited love or jealousy may be painful.

Finally, Solomon challenges a third and much invoked charge against sentimentality's immorality: against what could be expected, sentimental emotions do not lead to moral action. It was implicit in Wilde's phrase,

“the sentimentalist wants to have the luxury of the emotion *without paying for it*”, meaning that he does not act upon his emotion. Solomon answers that, on the one hand, emotions do not always motivate for action, and some of “our ‘best’ emotions may sometimes be those upon which any “direct action” is simply impossible.”⁴ On the other hand, he holds that the sentimentalist might be better prepared for moral action than the detached person, since she is sensitized by her emotions to certain features of the world, which could pass overlooked by others. So for instance sentimental feelings towards the infancy may prepare us against children abuse.

In sum, against the standard view, Solomon defends the rationality of sentimental emotions, which may be well-directed, appropriate and lead to action. Besides, sentimental emotions can be directed towards the wrong object, be inappropriate or paralyze. But other emotions may also be exaggerated, ill directed, self-involving, the object of self-gratification, or motivationally lacking. And nevertheless they do not deserve the bad press that accompany sentimentality.

2. Fabricated Emotions and Self-deception

The starting point of this paper is that sentimentality is not identical to an “expression of and appeal to tender feelings”, as Solomon’s “minimal definition” states. It is tender or sweet emotions that are usually considered sentimental. However there are other more ‘masculine’ emotions that may also be sentimental, such as anger, righteous indignation or jealousy.⁵ In fact all emotions can be sentimentalized. The “minimal definition” seems too minimal, even if Solomon is right that the features mentioned by the standard view are neither sufficient nor necessary conditions of sentimentality. Instead of the minimal definition I shall claim that sentimentality is a moral and aesthetic fault, a form of emotional self-deception linked to untrue expression. M. Tanner and A. Savile, among others, have already maintained that sentimentality is a form of self-deception, linked to the

⁴ It is obviously so with grief, compassion or sympathy. See Solomon, R., “On Kitsch and Sentimentality”, in Solomon, *op.cit.*

⁵ Solomon himself often comments on Kundera’s denunciation of political kitsch and sentimentality.

pleasure and the gratifying self-image that the sentimentalist obtains indulging in certain feelings. What I want to emphasize here is the expressive source of the deceit. So, I aim to define sentimentality in terms of fabricated feelings, and emotional self-deception.

First, I shall claim that the sentimentalist fabricates an emotion. Thus, sentimentality is in the first place a flaw against sincerity. Secondly, I will try to show that the sentimentalist is deceived about the true nature of her emotions. So sentimentality is also a form of self-deception. That what is characteristic of the most interesting cases of sentimentality is that sentimental persons are not liars or impostors, in the sense that they do not try to mislead others about their real sentiments, but rather they behave and try to lead a life in a certain sentimental way. It may be well possible that at the core of a sentimental emotion there is the desire of feeling intensely, or leading an intense emotional life, which makes the sentimentalist fabricate the emotion. The satisfaction of this desire explains self-indulgence and deprives the sentimentalist the critical attitude required for self-knowledge.

I shall present this proposal by analysing how can emotions be fabricated? (§ 3), and how is emotional self-deception possible? (§ 4) That is, how one can be deceived about the real nature of emotions that one-self has forged. Although both questions are closely related, I shall refer first to the source of sentimental emotions, and then turn to the question about the possibility of emotional self-deception.

3. How Is It Possible To Fabricate Emotions?

There are two plausible answers to the first question or ‘How is it possible to fabricate emotions?’ First, by finding an adequate content for them. Second, by making up the expression of feelings conventionally associated with the emotion.

3.1. One way to fabricate emotions is indirectly by finding adequate contents for them. When reality does not offer material to feed her emotions, the sentimentalist tries to make it fit with the emotion, looking for objects big or small that could do the trick, overestimating the importance of certain events, or misperceiving certain figures or events. It is in this sense

that Savile⁶ holds that the sentimentalist idealizes or beautifies reality in order to secure the emotions he seeks for. So Don Quixote mistook the peasant woman, Aldonza Lorenzo, for his Lady, Dulcinea del Toboso⁷, and equally the sentimentalist gives deals with a created reality he superimposes on the actual.

The problem is how something that one-self makes can be perceived as something that really is the case, and that consequently prompts an affective response. Interest, desire, expectation, or ideology may also cause misperception or wrong belief. The point is that the sentimentalist is said to be responsible to be the active agent of the distortion, and therefore he is suspicious of not believing what seems to believe. Not belief, but make-believe is the characteristic source of the sentimental distortion of reality. The sentimentalist is fond to storyze, and to imagine the world be certain way. And by making-believe she provokes the arousal of the corresponding feelings.

That make-believe may trigger rational feelings is a central point of different accounts of fiction⁸. According to these accounts, entertaining the thought of, envisaging, or seeing in a screen, a dangerous situation may provoke fear, even though the represented state of affairs is fictional. But also in real life, make-believe is source of feelings and actions: for instance, walking alone back home late at night on a deserted street the mere imagining of someone around the corner provokes fear, trembling, makes one be alert, and even run to the entrance door of her house. It contributes to the success of make-believe that in real life like in fiction

⁶ Savile, A. (2002), "Sentimentality", Neill, A. & Ridley, A., *Arguing about Art. Contemporary Philosophical Debates*, London: Routledge, p. 316.

⁷ "Her name was Aldonza Lorenzo, and upon her he thought fit to confer the title of Lady of his Thoughts; and after some search for a name which should not be out of harmony with her own, and should suggest and indicate that of a princess and great lady, he decided upon calling her Dulcinea del Toboso—she being of El Toboso—a name, to his mind, musical, uncommon, and significant". (The Spanish names sound connotes vulgarity and delicacy respectively).

⁸ Specifically, Walton's account of representations as make-believe. See *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Cambridge Mass. Harvard University Press, 1990. But other accounts such as Currie's simulationist model or Lamarque's and Carroll's thought model share the idea that fictitious representations prompt rational feelings based on merely entertained thoughts or imaginings.

make-believe has norms and uses props that support the make-believe. A corner impedes the vision to the other side, in a solitary street nobody can help us in case of a dangerous encounter, Aldonza Lorenzo is an existing woman, with whom Alonso Quijano was in love in a time, even windmills move their like arms. Perception and imagination, belief and make-believe merge and explain feelings and behaviour of the sentimentalist.

Obviously once make-believe has triggered the corresponding feelings, feelings in turn influence the perception of reality, and sometimes reality itself. It goes without saying that reality is obviously not something that can be changed at will, but nevertheless social reality depends on the very agents engaged in the situation. Imagination plays a role in many everyday occasions, without distorting or blurring reality. For instance, anticipating an event, or envisaging a situation, is convenient preparation for action. We go happily to a party anticipating the fun, and that predisposes us to find the party, and eventually making it, enjoyable. That is, nourished by make-believe expectations and attitudes contribute to the creation of the state of affairs that has been firstly just imagined.

Sentimental distortion of reality may come out from an active engagement in make-believe, which nevertheless is also a psychological recourse in everyday life. The make-believe situation does not come out of the blue, but reality offers the sentimentalist props for his feelings. So the sentimentalist's imagination and stories find ground in perception, and belief. Only the sentimentalist exploits the recourse for his entertaining the feeling. Eventually, feelings that make-believe provokes may in the circumstances render also reality sentimental. This is the case with sentimental relations, whether erotic, familiar or of friendship.

3.2. A second way to fabricate emotions consists in making up the expression corresponding to feelings associated to certain emotion. This mechanism goes deeper into the affective and aesthetic rather than cognitive character of the sentimental flaw. And it is in this sense in which I hold that sentimentality's source is basically untrue expression. That is why the sentimentalist is often considered, to say the least, theatrical. But expressing and pretending to feel that way or so intensely, the sentimentalist is overwhelmed for his own acting.

The reason why a faked expression may be source of the feeling ex-

pressed should be looked after in the vicinity of expression and feeling. It was James who first pointed out that having an emotion is being aware of the physiological or corporal changes provoked by the perception of certain states of affairs.⁹ So emotion was considered to be not the cause of the body changes, but to the contrary their awareness. This idea inverts the picture according to which first comes the feeling, expression, latter.

Certainly, referring to basic emotions like fear or disgust, expressive behaviour seems to be quite indistinguishable from the feeling. The more or less immediate reaction to certain situation is expressive. That what is felt is the tensed muscles, the trembling or the nausea. It may be held that it is not clear in which sense this body changes are expressions. Nausea is not. And neither are the trembling nor the tension in the muscles, at least to the extent that the person cannot control them. But limiting the use of expression and expressive behaviour to those movements controlled by the subject, or those gestures or behaviour in which the person express fear or disgust, instead of being the fear or the disgust which are expressing – revealing themselves, also primitive reactions can be considered expressive, when the person's body shows a cognitive perception of the objects that cause gesture or movement. Expressing anger or disgust is more than noticing the trembling or the nausea, but realizing the causal connexion between the states of affairs and the trembling or the nausea. So that the person is afraid of the dog, or Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #175* disgusts her.

Expressive behaviour is very dependent on context, on the agent's traits of character, or education even in the simplest cases. Besides, expression it is not always an immediate reaction to an external situation. Cognitively more complex emotions may require intellectual analysis of the situation and of the self's attitude towards the situation. So that not only expressive behaviour, but also feeling itself, is dependent on context, personality or education. The fact that expressive behaviour as a response to external circumstances is not always immediate only means that feeling is neither. Cannot be feelings unexpressed, then? In principle, the expression of feelings can be repressed – even disgust can be. But then we are admitting that to some degree the expressive movement has been started.

⁹ “My thesis is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion”, James, W. (1884), “What is an Emotion?” *Mind*, 9, 34, 189-90.

There seems to make no sense the idea of a feeling, which is not bodily felt in some degree.

We need not commit with the idea of feeling as posterior to expression to defend that the sentimentalist fabricate the emotion forging its expression, however. Without endorsing total identification between feeling and expression, often creating the symptoms of feeling – adopting gestures and demeanour – stirs the feeling¹⁰. Singing with expression moves, and reciting a poem with the appropriate intonation and rhythm provides it with expressive form, as if were the outcome of feeling. The sentimentalist ends undergoing the emotions whose expression has made up, not due to her credulous character but because of the very nature of expression.

And nevertheless there is something misleading in the former considerations. To express an inner condition is not just to move certain parts of the body or to utter certain words. Something else is required to fake an emotion with some guaranty of success. It is often remarked how many muscular movements are implied in facial expression, so that a liar can be discovered because it is unable to control them all. What I find illustrative here is that it is not moving the muscles what makes a facial lie expressive, but the intention of expressing or letting out an inner condition. Expressive behaviour does not merely reproduce expressive patterns, but it is rather the performance of an expressive activity. There is expression properly when a voluntary or not inhibited bodily movement comes out as the result of an expressive activity of the subject. So to scream in the grip of anger does not consist in making certain movements with the vocal organs, but in performing the action of screaming in anger. Anger may start by artificially elevating the tone of voice and getting the muscles tensed, but when these body movements are connected with the mental condition of getting angry. Or imagining getting angry, which is the state in which the sentimentalist put himself. The performance stimulates the feeling, and in turn the feeling feedbacks the performance.

The sentimentalist behaves expressively as it is considered to be ad-

¹⁰ In “Four Theories of Artistic Expression” Gombrich refers that “when the cockatoo feels happy, it nods its head up and down; allegedly, it is easy to change the mood of the bird from anger to happiness, simply by grasping its head and moving it up and down”. And he added: “in a way we are all such cockatoos.” (Gombrich, E.H. (1980), “Four Theories of Artistic Expression”, *Architectural Association Quarterly*, 12, 151).

equate in the circumstances; that is, her expressed feelings are directed towards appropriate, although selected at will or idealized objects. And here comes the relevance of the first mechanism for fabricating emotions: to imagine or make-believe the content of the emotion. Both mechanisms, imagining the object and expressing the feeling, collaborate. While in the creation and interpretation of a fiction we are aware of the imaginative or make-believe character of our thoughts, and the corresponding feelings towards characters and other fictional objects, expressing insincerely the sentimentalist creates the feelings, and she is taking in by his pretence.

Sentimental people are said to be prone to undergo unwarranted and shallow emotions. But very often they are also blamed for expressing their feelings with exaggeration, or affectedly, up to the point that the sentimentalist is often suspicious of forging emotions, or expressing emotions he does not feel, or not with the intensity his expression shows. Their theatricality deserves the aesthetic disapproval that is at the same time a charge for insincerity. And nevertheless he could be blind to the failure.

4. Sentimental Self-Deception

Now I turn to the second question or how can the sentimentalist mistake his faked feelings for real ones? Or how emotional self-deception is possible. Emotional self-deception is such a common phenomenon as cognitive self-deception, even if internalism may have more chances referred to affective states than to cognitive states. It is hard to see that one can doubt about feeling sad or being afraid. But looking into the past, we are often surprised to figure out our real sentiments, how deep was our affection towards someone, or how shallow our happiness. Beliefs, desires, social conventions, other emotions and so on make us often to be mistaken about our real emotions. What is even more complex to explain is how are we mistaken about the real character of feelings that may be our construction, as I have defended about sentimental feelings. That is, how can the sentimentalist be self-deceived?

4.1. Primarily, emotional self-deception may be explained as an easy consequence of cognitive self-deception. A believes that she believes that P, while she actually believes that no-P. Correspondingly, she believes that

she feels E, while actually she feels no-E. For example, because María believes that she believes that Juan is cute, she also believes that she likes him. And nevertheless, since she does not really believe that Juan is a cute child –but she rather finds him spoiled–, she does not feel genuine sympathy towards him. Because María brings herself to the idea that Juan is cute, and because she behaves expressively corresponding to such an idea, she does not permit herself to elaborate her intuition about the real character of the child. So she is self-deceived about her liking. The example may show that cognitive self-deception needs not point to the simultaneous occurrence of contrary beliefs, but other cognitive states may better explain self-deception. There is no need to explain María's attitudes, the false and the actual ones, as of belief. An assumed thought (that Juan is cute) may be cancelling a perception, an intuition (that Juan is spoiled). The cause may be that María might have a sentimental tendency to believe in children's innocence.

Tamar Szabo Gendler has claimed that pretending to believe instead of believing may do better to explain cognitive self-deception. She holds that when we are self-deceived, we do not simultaneously maintain two contrary beliefs (P and not-P), but instead that we imagine, make-believe, or fantasise that not-P, while really believing that p. Self-deception is psychologically plausible due to the phenomenological similarity between both mental states, belief and make-believe, and here she appeals to the vivacity of imagination or make-believe, and to the potential motivational force of the make-believe or imagined representation of reality.¹¹

Now if Gendler is right, make-believe may deceive the self about her actual beliefs, and consequently about her actual feelings. Moreover, it is likely that since make-believe prompts feelings, the make-believe feelings contribute in turn to cognitive self-deception. By making-believe the content, the sentimentalist fabricates the feeling, and in turn the feeling secures him about the accuracy of the make-believe state of affairs. In

¹¹ “*Self-Deception as Pretense*: A person who is self-deceived about not-P pretends (in the sense of *makes-believe* or *imagines* or *fantasizes*) that not-P is the case, often while believing that P is the case and not believing that not-P is the case. The pretense that not-P largely plays the role normally played by belief in terms of (i) introspective vivacity and (ii) motivation of action in a wide range of circumstances”. Tamar Szabo Gendler (2007), “Self-deception as pretense”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 21, Philosophy of Mind, 233-4.

fact the “introspective vivacity” of make-believe contents that make self-deception possible has relation with the phenomenology of the corresponding feelings. So the phenomenological similarity between genuine and fictional feelings may play a role explaining cognitive self-deception, particularly in sentimentality.

4.2. Emotional self-deception may also be explained by the difficulty of obtaining evidence about the self’s own emotions. For testing the veracity and the deepness of an emotion requires testing more than the truth of its content, knowing about the attitude in which the self stands towards the content. In this respect, feelings usually are taken as source of that knowledge. In spite of the possibility of error, the vicinity of the self and her feelings makes it difficult to doubt about them. In fact, feelings are often considered the best evidence about emotions. It is not inadequate to infer from the expressed anxiety felt in presence of the beloved that the persona speaking in Sapho’s *Ode to Anactoria* is in love. Sapho’s depiction of the implicit persona’s feelings and feelings’ expression when she sees her beloved is evidence of her love, and of the intensity of her love:

For when I see thee but a little, I have no utterance left, my tongue is broken down, and straightway a subtle fire has run under my skin, with my eyes I have no sight, my ears ring, sweat pours down, and a trembling seizes all my body; I am paler than grass, and seem in my madness little better than one dead.¹²

It is indeed a short and intense fragment among the first lyric expressions of erotic love. The value of the poem rests on the poet capacity to give expression to the felt distress of the I of the poem at the sight of the beloved. Now, it is obviously the reader, and not the poem persona who knows about the emotion that overwhelm her. The I of the poem expresses an emotion, and expresses it truly, without minding about knowing herself, and the reader gets convinced of her feelings quality. Expressing sincerely is in a sense the closest distance in which one can stand of self-knowledge, but sincerity of expression is precisely what the sentimentalist lacks. So, even though feelings can be considered evidence of emotions, the truth is that it is not to the self to know about the feelings but to express them.

¹² Sapho’s *Ode to Anactoria* (Translated by H.T. Wharton)

For once the self asks herself about the significance of certain feelings trying to know about the emotions they might be symptoms of, the partition of the self enters in play, and so the possibility of deceit.

4.3. According to the preceding paragraph once self-reflection comes into play error is possible. However self-reflection and introspection are necessary tools of self-knowledge. Now testing our emotions by introspection requires bringing the emotion (or its feelings) to the mind: possibly recalling or imagining their objects, the scenario, and imagining ourselves in it. It involves mental dramatization that provides the self with images that have the benefit of intimacy and that are at the same time the clearest evidence, and also the best deceit: the clearest evidence due to the close connection between imagining feeling and feeling;¹³ and the best deceit because dramatization implies the possibility of the self acting other than what she would actually behave. That is, the most obvious objection to the efficacy of introspection as a means of self-knowledge is the active role that the self plays in it, and the more or less conscious manipulation of memories, thoughts and feelings.

However, once again the problem about self-deception is how can one be deceived about something she is doing? For the main difference between make-believe as the mental operation working on fictional engagement, and make-believe in private imagining, or self-observation, is that in the first fictional case we are the audience and on certain occasions the actor, while in mental dramatization we are also authors and actors. Reading the *Ode to Anactoria*, that is, endorsing the first person's voice of the poem or just empathizing with her, Sapho's poem guide our acting or our responses. But in the mental dramatization required to imagine one-self in certain circumstances in order to investigate her responses, the self is at once the author, the actor, and the audience.

For the sentimentalist mental dramatization is in itself a source of self-deception. For in mental dramatization the make-believe self needs not be identical to us, whatever this means. We can make-believe being the first person voice of Sapho's poem, that is, imagine from the inside being Sapho's character, and we can also imagine from the inside to be better

¹³ Wollheim, R. (1974), "Imagination and Identification", *On Art and the Mind*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

person, smarter or more sensitive than we really are. In the latter case we create our character, but in both cases identification is psychologically plausible. In fact, identification with someone similar to us, just a bit better, is quite general, even though the script is likely to be not so good as Sapho's. Literature, and art in general, provides us with models that we will be willing to imitate, but sentimental people, like Don Quixote or Emma Bovary, do not always enjoy the great literature. But this is another topic.

The point of introspection as a source of self-knowledge is to let the self behave such as she would do in real life situations. So that even if we activate mental dramatization, that is we are the authors of the representation, there is a point in which the drama can go on without the conscious intervention of the self.¹⁴ There is a point after which we are no more dictating the make-believe, but the character we imagine to be, ourselves, acts without our direct intervention. We don't need to guide consciously her acting, but the character in our dramatization acts on our mental repertoire and possesses our character. As far as we are the actors, the reflective spectator self can learn something about us that we were not sure or conscious about. But there is no way to control the accuracy of our acting.

4.4. Emotional self-knowledge is really hard work, and that may explain self-deception. But more than the difficulties of knowing about one's own emotions, that what characterizes the sentimentalist is the attitude she adopts towards the knowledge. For she accepts without reserve the picture obtained from mental dramatization. According to Tanner:

Eventually, for the sentimentalist is not hard to be mistaken about her emotions not only due to the nature of feelings, but also for the attitude adopted by the self towards herself. For it is characteristic of the sentimental emotion as a form of self-deception that it is resistant to falsification. The sentimentalist lacks a collaborative attitude for testing her emotions. It is characteristic for sentimentalist to inhibit those checking devices which are available, though hard to handle, for interrogating one's experiences, for asking whether one's

¹⁴ Wollheim, *loc.cit.*, p. 36.

feelings are primarily controlled by their object if they have one, and what *kind* of communication they are maintaining with it.¹⁵

The reason why the sentimentalist resists to test her emotions is often said to be that she has the emotion for “its own sake”, what causes her to lose contact with the object of the emotion. In separating from its object the emotion tends to feed on itself, and the belief about the object and the object itself are merely instrumental. The sentimental person in fact tends to react in the same way, and with same intensity to different objects, and in different contexts. She is predictable in her reactions, as the object is minimally relevant to her responses. The love lover falls in love for every person over whom to project his imaginings, the righteous indignant protest against all unfair situations without minding whom it affects, or if it is really injustice the cause of the harm. That is why Tanner points to the relevance of the kind of communication that the feeling keeps with its object, and he suggests that asking for this communication is a way to test our emotions.

According to D-H. Lawrence famous words: “We all want to have certain feelings: feelings of love, of passionate sex, of kindness and so forth”.¹⁶ At the core of sentimental emotions may be a desire of having an intense emotional life, which is satisfied vicariously. The desire to feel passionately is source of the disconnection between feeling and object. I think that a sentimental emotion has the wrong *kind* of communication with its object because the emotion rises from a desire with no connection to the object. The desire influences the development of attitudes towards objects that do not actually provoke the wanted feelings, attitudes that are surrogates of emotions rooted in desires and attitudes harder to obtain and less subjected to manipulation. The object may well be worthy of the feeling, sentimentality may sensitize us to certain features of the

¹⁵ Tanner, *op. cit.*, p.100.

¹⁶ The whole fragment goes: “We all want to have certain feelings: feelings of love, of passionate sex, of kindness and so forth. Very few people really feel love, or sex passion, or kindness, or anything else that goes at all deep. So the mass just fake these feelings inside themselves. Faked feelings! The world is all gummy with them. They are better than real feelings, because you can spit them out when you brush your teeth; and then you can fake them afresh again” (D-H Lawrence, *John Galsworthy*”, cited in M. Budd (1995), *Values of art*, London, Penguin, p. 96.)

world that deserve attention, and may motivate us for action, as Solomon pointed out. But instead of spontaneously reacting to certain objects or events, the sentimentalist makes a voluntary move to consider object or event good occasions to express the adequate feelings, and to satisfy even if only imaginatively her desire to undergo these feelings. The sentimentalist fabricates the emotion because she knows the kind of objects that stimulates genuinely the feeling. But the conditions of a genuine or deep emotion have not grown in her. And once the feeling has been expressed, it nourishes itself, and it is not surprising that the object that served to excite it loses force, or disappears, since it does not belong to the causal story of the sentimental emotion, whose real cause is the desire related to one own life and self-image.

Actually the desire may be so forceful and its satisfaction so gratifying that the tendency to indulge in fabricated feelings overwhelms the sentimental person. As Tanner claimed we all are more or less sentimental depending on certain objects or others –pets, children, injustice, love, or time past. And adult life cannot be valuable without introspection, which is so close to the dangers of dramatization, and without memory and melancholy, which are so easily sentimental.

5. Self-Knowledge and Sincere Expression

In paragraph § 4.2 above I said in passing that self-knowledge might well amount to sincere expression. I can't defend the idea here but referring to the sentimentalist, the basic reason of her self-deceit because she is untrue to herself. She indulges in faked real or make-believe expression, and the inaccuracy of the feelings she undergoes can be matched against nothing else but her own sincere expression. That is why there is no easy way to avoid sentimentality, but emotional, basically expressive, education. To finish I want to suggest two routes emotional education can take. The two of them turn to be aesthetic in character, each referring to the two sources of sentimental feelings that I have been analysing. In the first place, acquaintance with good literature (and art) would make our make-believe richer and deeper, less fond to bright but shallow feelings. The second form of emotional education is expressive learning.

According to James emotional education consists in going against the expression of those feelings that seem suspicious of being too nice or intense to be true:

There is no more valuable precept in moral education than this, as all who have experience know: if we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in our selves, we must assiduously and in the first instance cold bloodedly, go through the *outwards motions* of those contrary dispositions we prefer to cultivate.¹⁷

James' precept however seems hard to follow, and not without risks. I shall point briefly to some of the risks that threaten education against sentimentality: first, the risk of insensitivity. Repressing (the expression of) emotions that are suspicious of distorting reality, dislocate from its objects, or cause pleasure comes close to repress all kinds of emotions. To that extent, it is obviously better to be sentimental than insensitive. Besides inhibiting the expression of those conditions that we "prefer to cultivate", we might miss many of the pleasures of life: not just to feel, but also to share the feeling.

A second risk that Solomon put in the foreground is that criticism of sentimentality may well be paradoxically a sign of self-deception: "the attack on sentimentality is wrongheaded and, possible worse, a matter of self-deception or serious self-denial"¹⁸. At the core of the deceiving may lay a fear of vulnerability, frustration, or incapacity to bear pain in the world, as Solomon convincingly made the case about Nietzsche's refusal of *Mitleid* or compassion.

Third is the risk of confusing "sentimentality" with "emotional generosity", in Tanner's terms. Contrary to the sentimentalist, the emotional generous behaves freely on her emotions, "without anxiety about the point and value of doing it"¹⁹. This anxiety characterises sentimental expression,

¹⁷ James, W., *Loc. Cit.* p. 198. I owe this particular idea, and inspiration for my whole conception of sentimental self-deception to Manuel Hernández Iglesias (2007), "La voluntad de no creer", <http://philpapers.org/asearch.pl?pubn=AnálisisFilosófico> *Análisis Filosófico* 27 (1): 5-22.

¹⁸ Solomon, *op. cit.* 19.

¹⁹ About emotional generosity Tanner declares: "... I take to be (emotional generosity), together with vitality, to which it is closely linked, the most desirable of all human qualities." Tanner, *loc. cit.*, p. 104.

contrary to the easiness of sincere expression. And that is the main reason why I consider sentimentality to be aesthetically flawed. Sentimental expressions often make manifest the expresser's anxiety, in need of being reinforced in the feeling and recognised by the others. There is nothing worse for expression than being overworked. That is also why sentimentality in art is linked to kitsch and the use of clichés.

As Solomon ironizes in the fragment mentioned at top of this paper, we are usually timorous to confront big or intense expressions of emotion. Expression has not primarily a communicative, rhetoric, cathartic, or other purpose, but it is rather the outer counterpart of a mental state. The spontaneity that characterises the emotional generous is a mark of sincerity, but social life, the other's eyes, and our own self-consideration make us nearly always anxious about expression. May be only sense of humour can help us to accept the possibility that our sincere emotions may pass unrecognized and our sentimental ones detected.

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