Article

Reason, Emotion, and the Crisis of Democracy in British Philosophy of the 1930s

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Abstract: This article examines how British philosophers of the 1930s grappled with the relationship between reason, emotion, and democratic citizenship in the context of a perceived "crisis of democracy" in Europe. Focusing especially on Bertrand Russell, Susan Stebbing, and John Macmurray, it argues that philosophers working from diverse philosophical perspectives shared a sense that the crisis of democracy was simultaneously a crisis of reason and one of emotion. They tended to frame this crisis in terms of three interrelated concerns: first, as a problem of balancing or integrating reason and emotion; second, as a problem of the relationship between emotions and democratic citizenship; and third, as a problem of how to properly train or educate the emotions. Significantly, British philosophers addressed these issues most directly in writings for a non-professional audience, as they sought to translate their professional expertise into popular works that might rejuvenate democratic citizenship. This historical episode is a reminder of how philosophers were deeply engaged in the cultural politics of the interwar period and is a telling example of how personalist concerns were central to philosophy even as the "analytic revolution" was gathering steam.

Keywords: Bertrand Russell; Susan Stebbing; John Macmurray; reason; emotion; crisis of democracy; democratic citizenship; interwar Britain

1. Introduction

Writing in 1937, R.G. Collingwood concluded his aesthetic treatise *The Principles of Art* [1] with an admiring exegesis of what he deemed "the one great English poem of this century": T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (p. 295)[1]. The poem's greatness derived in part from its harrowing depiction of "a world where the wholesome flowing water of emotion, which alone fertilizes all human activity, has dried up" [1] (p. 335). Yet, in his *Essay on Metaphysics*, published roughly two years later, he decried a rising "irrationalist epidemic" characterized by the replacement of "orderly thinking" with "emotional thinking" and various forms of emotionalism [2] (p. 135). The tension between these two assessments suggests a problem that Collingwood was not alone in confronting: if the condition of a civilization could be compromised by both a scarcity of emotion and a surfeit of it, then surely emotion had a significance in human life that demanded philosophical attention.

That, at least, was the sense among many British philosophers of the 1930s as their country continued its political drift and the situation in Europe turned increasingly grim. These philosophers, whose professional identity was founded on an understanding of themselves as custodians of reason, were forced during the 1930s to a deeper appreciation of the role of the emotions in guiding reason along constructive paths. The notion that thinkers of the interwar period understood themselves to be living through a crisis of reason is not new, but my argument in this article is that many British philosophers of the 1930s saw this crisis of reason as being simultaneously a crisis of emotion. They understood the parlous state of reason to be linked to an emotional disorder or failure at the heart of modern civilization, and they tended to frame this emotional crisis in terms of three interrelated concerns: first, as a problem of balancing or integrating reason and emotion;

second, as a problem of the relationship between emotions and democratic citizenship; and third, as a problem of how to properly train or educate the emotions.

In this article, I will trace these themes in the work of the philosophers Bertrand Russell, Susan Stebbing, and John Macmurray, all prominent voices on the philosophical scene in the interwar period. I have selected these thinkers for two reasons: first, though they represented a range of philosophical perspectives, they shared a sense of concern about the emotional condition of their fellow citizens; and second, they articulated this concern in writings that were intended *for* those citizens, that is, for a largely non-professional audience of "common readers". Russell, Stebbing, and Macmurray, then, are thinkers who reveal clearly how "crisis of emotion" rhetoric was an extension of the widespread interwar concern about the crisis of reason and the fate of democracy in Britain and Europe. Macmurray captured the prevailing pessimism when, in the early 1930s, he lamented, "We are a democracy faced with the gravest issues that history has ever produced..." [3] (p. 4). Indeed, these intersecting crises seemed so dire that these philosophers felt compelled to set aside their professional detachment in order to exhort and instruct their fellow citizens regarding the proper function of emotions in a democratic society. I will conclude with some comments on how we might understand philosophical interest in the emotions in relation to recent scholarship that draws attention to the significance of concept of "the person" as a concept in twentieth-century cultural politics.

2. A Crisis of Reason and Democracy

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw a rising tide of concern about a "crisis of reason" in Britain. This concern stemmed from various causes, three of which seem particularly salient. First, much of the concern about reason was related to challenges arising from psychology. This discipline, marked at the time by its practitioners' increasing confidence in its explanatory power, seemed to offer a picture of the human mind as something shaped to a large degree by unconscious urges and motives. Such an understanding of the mind put pressure on philosophers to clarify their own view of rationality: was reason, wondered the *New Statesman's* anonymous reviewer of philosophy books, no more than a floating cork washed about by the waves of irrational instinct and subconscious desire [4] (p. 286)? This reviewer spoke for many when he welcomed any effort to rehabilitate reason in the face of "the prevalent irrationalism of the age" [4] (p. 286). Writing in the *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, the psychologist William McDougall similarly noted how an emphasis on obscure yet powerful instincts was "displacing the threadbare and sterile view of man as a machine plus Reason, or as a machine whose Reason is but part of the mechanism" [5] (p. 361)[2]. McDougall pointed in particular to Freud, Adler, and Jung, "for all of whom Reason is but a feeble shoot springing from the deep, dim, massive foundation of subconscious strivings of the instinctive tendencies" [5] (p. 361). Psychological research and its philosophical implications were, then, a major concern of philosophers in the 1920s and 1930s, with a steady stream of book reviews and articles devoted to the subject appearing in both mainstream periodicals and professional journals.

Second, concern about the viability of democracy in Britain also brought concerns about rationality to the fore[3]. How could citizens be taught to think in ways that were conducive to the functioning and, hopefully, the flourishing of democracy? As the political scientist Ernest Barker framed the problem in his 1936 *Education for Citizenship* [8]:

> ...if you *don't* educate for citizenship, and *don't* educate for the State, you are inviting trouble—at any rate when your State is a democratic State, demanding thought and intelligence from its members, and when your state is confronted, as it is to-day, by complicated problems of economic planning within, and of international policy without, which crave the wariest of walking. (p. 8)[4]

One kind of "trouble" that could arise from a failure to educate for citizenship was attraction to dictatorship. This trouble could arise precisely because, as Barker argued elsewhere, while democracy could satisfy certain emotional needs, it left others unsatisfied,

providing an opening for dictatorship. Dictatorship had "qualities and merits which make it an alternative to democracy. It may satisfy human emotions of loyalty which democracy leaves starved" [9] (p. 401)[5]. Moreover, as Barker and many of his contemporaries were well aware, the economic difficulties of the 1920s and 1930s and the attendant aggravation of class conflict created just the circumstances in which faith in democracy could begin to fail. Macmurray recalled a prewar era in which "we really believed in democracy. I mean that we believed in trusting the people to decide great issues for themselves and for the politicians." By the early 1930s, however, this confidence seemed to be gone, and he was compelled to ask, "Do we believe in democracy now? Don't we rather cry out for somebody to save us, to protect us, to take the big decisions for us" [3] (p. 9)? Hence the outpouring of writings raising questions about the ability of citizens, in straitened economic conditions and in an unsettled political environment, to act rationally in ways that sustained democratic society. A case in point was the General Strike of 1926. Though it lasted less than two weeks, this large-scale industrial action revealed deep divisions within British society and underscored the need for citizens to be able to recognize and critically assess propaganda, whether it was produced by their government or by organized groups of fellow citizens. The importance of the connection between reason and the social fabric was only underscored by the advent of full democracy in Britain, as instituted by the Equal Franchise Act of 1928. In a nation where all adults possessed the franchise, it seemed all the more imperative that they learn to exercise it rationally.

Finally, the rise of fascism demonstrated that anxieties about dictatorship were justified and provided a sobering reminder that reason was a precarious achievement, rather than an innate feature of modern society. Taking stock of political prospects in Britain and Europe in 1934, *The Economist* summed up these anxieties by noting that "affirmation[s] of faith in the rationality of the common man" seemed inadequate in light of an ineffectual British government and the recent "Nazi Revolution" [11] (p. 1). It was in this context that the International Congress of Philosophy convened in September 1934. The topic that dominated the meeting was "the Crisis in Democracy". The journal *Philosophy* encouraged its readers to attend the conference if at all possible, framing attendance almost as a democratic duty, given that "the main issue that is being fought out in the politics of nations at the present moment is that of democracy versus one or other form of dictatorship. . ." [12] (p. 131)[6].

In an attempt to improve the rationality of the ordinary British citizen, a number of writers produced books on how to think clearly and well during the 1930s, which proved to be a boom decade for such texts. Siobhan Chapman has documented the proliferation of such primers, which were not unknown in philosophical circles—Susan Stebbing, for one, was well aware of this literature [14] (p. 128). If Barker had identified the urgent necessity of educating for citizenship, then these books can be seen as answering his call. With titles like *Straight and Crooked Thinking* (1930), *Prejudice and Impartiality* (1932), *Training for Citizenship* (1935), *Thinking* (1936), *Clear Thinking* (1936), and, for good measure, *Clearer Thinking* (1936), these books aimed to produce, as one of them put it, a "really educated democracy, distrustful of emotional phraseology" and to equip citizens with the intellectual tools needed "solve the problems of war and poverty. . ." [15] (p. 244)[7]. The vogue for citizenship education was also reflected in the creation of new institutions, such as Ernest Simon's Association for Education in Citizenship (founded in 1934), and the increasing interest in citizenship taken by existing institutions such as the British Institute of Adult Education[8].

Significantly, these handbooks on clear thinking for the democratic citizen often made a case for integrating—rather than segregating—reason and emotion. R.W. Jepson's influential 1936 volume *Clear Thinking: An Elementary Course of Preparation for Citizenship* argued, "There is no place, we are told, for emotion in honest and clear thinking. True, emotion cannot take the place of thought, but it can stimulate, inspire, and clarify thought, if the emotion be noble" [20] (p. 4). Or, as another of these texts argued, "[I]t is perfectly possible to feel strongly and yet remain impartial. Impartiality does not mean the suppression of feeling. . ." [17] (p. 11). Thus, when philosophers talked of a crisis of reason and emotion,

they were joining a conversation that was in progress in society at large and that was implicated in much larger issues, such as the fate of British democracy itself.

3. Bertrand Russell: Emotion and the Social Order

Perhaps predictably, the self-proclaimed rationalist Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was one of the key participants in this conversation, and his contributions to it showed how "crisis of reason" rhetoric could go hand-in-hand with "crisis of emotion" rhetoric. His work also shows how the roots of concern about the fragility of reason reach back as far as the intellectual stock-taking that followed the First World War. In a much-reprinted 1923 essay entitled "Can Men Be Rational?", Russell noted how, "in these days rationality has received many hard knocks, so that it is difficult to know what one means by it, or whether. . .it is something human beings can achieve" [26] (p. 14). By the mid-1930s, Russell had concluded that "the opponents of reason" were only gaining strength [27] (p. 919). Throughout the 1930s, he returned time and again to the theme of a growing crisis of reason, often in writings intended for a non-professional audience. Yet, Russell frequently wrote as if the crisis of reason were equally a crisis of emotion—people could not think clearly in part because they could not feel correctly. This emotional crisis forced a reconsideration of how to constrain the emotions, of how to educate them, and even simply of how to properly appreciate their influence on the process of thought.

Russell developed his views on these issues in writings intended for a non-professional audience. By the 1930s, Russell had become a prolific writer of popular philosophy, producing literally dozens of books in a colloquial vein between the beginning of the First World War and the end of the Second. Topicality, a lack of technical philosophical jargon, and a fluid style made these works highly approachable. However, Russell's often Olympian tone was in sharp contrast to Macmurray's conversational register, and a relative paucity of specific examples meant that Russell's popular works lacked the concrete vividness and relatability of Stebbing's. Russell was more apt to rely on the broad, unsupported generalization than on the telling example drawn from everyday life: "It is of the highest importance that whatever discipline may exist should not involve more than a minimum of emotional restraint, for a child who feels himself thwarted in any important way is liable to develop various undesirable characteristics the nature of which will depend upon his strength of character" [28] (p. 41). Similarly, Russell's chapter (discussed below) on "Propaganda in Education" in *Education and the Social Order* contains not a single analysis of an actual piece of propaganda, whereas Stebbing reproduces numerous examples of confused thinking in her popular works of the period. Russell was also prone to knowing historical and literary references, which Macmurray and Stebbing eschew[9]. Nevertheless, though Russell had a tendency to declaim to his readers rather than invite them to think with him (as Macmurray and Stebbing preferred to do), the volume of his output and the frequency with which his books were reprinted indicates that his views—including those on emotion, reason, and citizenship—still found a sizable audience.

Russell by no means saw emotion as merely the antithesis of reason. His extensive educational writings emphasized how proper emotional formation was necessary to establish the equilibrium of thought and feeling that should characterize democratic citizens. Russell's influential 1932 book *Education and the Social Order* was deeply concerned with the proper formation of democratic citizens, which, he concluded, was about far more than simply forming the intellect: "The cultivation of the individual mind is not, on the face of it, the same thing as the production of a useful citizen" [28] (p. 10). He developed this point by way of distinctions between knowing, willing, and feeling, each of which, in proper measure, was a necessary constituent of a developed personality:

> But while the cognitive part of man is the basis of his excellence, it is far from being the whole of it. It is not enough to mirror the world. It should be mirrored with emotion: a specific emotion appropriate to the object, and a general joy in the mere act of knowing. But knowing and feeling together are still not enough for the complete human being. In this world of flux men bear their part as causes of change,

and in the consciousness of themselves as causes they exercise will and become aware of power. Knowledge, emotion, and power, all these should be widened to the utmost in seeking the perfection of the human being. [28] (p. 11)[10]

Russell's book was not so much about creating rational citizens as it was about creating citizens who habitually feel particular things and who are possessed of a certain democratic affect. Russell did not argue for suppressing the emotions as a necessary condition for democratic society. Rather, he argued for a system of education that cultivated the right kind of emotions, that helped citizens discriminate between dangerous and beneficial emotions, and that equipped them to resist the malign emotional manipulation that was part of modern life.

For Russell, both intuition and experience were sufficient to reveal that the emotions were an immensely significant part of the educational enterprise, yet this fact had also been confirmed "in a scientific manner" by Freud [28] (p. 58). It was Freud, he argued, who showed that repressed impulses do not die, but instead seek an outlet in some form of action, potentially one more harmful than that which has been repressed. Because this process of repression leads to "emotional disturbance," Russell concludes that, "It is therefore necessary to pay more attention to emotion, as opposed to overt behaviour, than is done by those who advocate conditioning as alone sufficient in the training of character" [28] (pp. 58–59). Education, then, could not be a mere behaviorist conditioning based on the correction of external actions, but must equally be concerned with the formation of the inner emotional self.

Moreover, Russell emphasized the connection between the emotional formation of children and the emotional health of the adults they would become. Because the emotional disposition of the child tends to persist in the adult, he contended, "It is therefore very important that children should have predominantly those emotional attitudes which, both in childhood and subsequently, will make them happy, successful, and useful, rather than those that lead to unhappiness, failure, and malevolence" [28] (p. 61). Whether by means of "the power of psychology" or the application of "intelligent affection," education depended on creating "the kind of environment that promotes desirable emotions" [28] (p. 61). This was a matter that had obvious implications for the condition of democratic societies, as it concerned educating children—which here means equipping them with certain "desirable emotions"—so that as adults they could live freely yet peacefully with fellow citizens.

But what were these "desirable emotions," and how precisely might they be inculcated? About these questions, Russell was not entirely clear: the "desirable emotions" are never explicitly listed or conclusively summarized; the reader is largely left to infer what they might be and how they might be developed, though there are clues. Russell tells us that the "attitude of the citizen" involves a desire "to bring harmony out of the conflicting wills that exist within his community" [28] (p. 12). Education in citizenship is thus defined as "education designed to produce social cohesion" [28] (p. 26). Also desirable was the complex of emotions tied to patriotism ("a feeling for one's own country") as opposed to nationalism (a feeling "against other countries") [28] (p. 136). Patriotism was built on "Love of home, love of one's native country, even a certain degree of pride in its historical achievements" and was "concerned with actual love of the soil and of familiar surroundings, partly with something analogous to an extended love of family" [28] (p. 135).

Russell emphasized the importance of family in a chapter on "Emotion and Discipline," which argued that if parenting techniques and educational systems adequately satisfied the needs of children for both safety and freedom, then the result would be socially transformative. The consequence would be citizens equipped with both a vigorous rationality and robust democratic fellow-feeling: "Their intelligence will be untrammeled, and their views on human affairs will have the kindliness that comes of contentment. A world of human beings with this emotional equipment would make short work of our social system, with its wars, its oppressions, its economic injustice, its horror of free speech and free inquiry, and its superstitious moral code. The toleration of these evils depends upon timidity in thought and malevolent feeling. . ." [28] (p. 63).

This was easier said than done, however, and throughout *Education and the Social Order*, Russell considered the many obstacles in the way of forming emotionally balanced democratic citizens. There were dangers and snares aplenty: cosseting and indulgent parents, cold and distant parents, indifferent teachers, nationalism, class prejudice, and jingoistic newspapers are just some of the sources of emotional malformation that Russell evaluated. One of the most significant, however, and one that is a subject of extended discussion in the book, is propaganda, which Russell was deeply concerned with preparing citizens to recognize and resist. *Education and the Social Order* was published a year before the Nazis came to power and inaugurated a new era in the use of propaganda, which makes Russell's comments seem all the more prescient. Yet, Russell had also lived through both the Great War and the General Strike of 1926, which had given him ample opportunity to observe propaganda deployed by the British government.

Propaganda posed a unique danger to the emotional fitness of a democracy, yet it also provided an acid test of that fitness, for it was in the confrontation between a sound democratic mind and propaganda that the fruits of proper emotional formation could be demonstrated. Chief among these was what Russell called "judgment", a kind of intuitive fusion of emotion and reason. It was for the sake of cultivating this capacity that he argued for exposing schoolchildren to propaganda in an educational setting. The purpose of such an exercise was not necessarily the sharpening of the students' rational capacities, but rather the formation of judgment, defined as the ability "to reach true conclusions on insufficient data" [28] (p. 227). Russell was well aware that he was an unlikely advocate for the development of such an amorphous skill: "As a logician I am conscious of uttering what is, in strict logic, mere nonsense when I say this; nevertheless all success in practical life depends upon ability to perform this apparently impossible feat" [28] (p. 227). Students thus equipped with judgment would not only be able to hold their own leaders to account, but would also be equipped to resist the manipulations of deceitful political actors who sought their support.

Intriguingly, the influential psychologist and social reformer Graham Wallas, with whom Russell was acquainted, was at the same time developing a concept of judgment based on the notion of reconciling reason and emotion. Wallas died in 1932, but two years later, his *Social Judgment* [30], a work that in many ways echoed themes of *Education and the Social Order,* was published. Like Russell's book, Wallas's was animated in part by "the growing threat of a war more dreadful than the last" and, in another move reminiscent of Russell, it addressed the question of how to coordinate thought, feeling, and action so that British democracy could thrive [30] (p. 16). Wallas argued "that the old distinction between 'reason' and 'emotion' corresponds to a real but often over-simplified psychological truth, and that human judgment requires a successful co-operation, which is neither inevitable nor impossible, between two imperfectly co-ordinated psychological factors" [30] (p. 20).

From first to last, then, *Education and the Social Order* grapples with the problem of the emotional formation of democratic citizens. For Russell, the fate of a society could turn on the way in which the emotions of its youth were shaped and directed. Indeed, this is the note on which the book concludes. In its final pages, after a brief catalogue of key problems and disappointments of modern civilization, including the seeming inevitability of another world war, Russell concludes that they all originate in emotions poisoned and perverted during the formative years: "The source of all this does not lie in the external world, nor does it lie in the purely cognitive part of our nature, since we know more than men ever knew before. It lies in our passions; it lies in our emotional habits; it lies in the sentiments instilled in youth, and then the phobias created in infancy." [28] (p. 247). *Education and the Social Order* makes it abundantly clear that Russell did not advocate suppressing the emotions as a necessary condition for democratic society. Neither did he contend that healthy democratic citizenship depended on incisive cognition, critical analysis, or training in logic. Rather, he argued for a system of education that cultivated the right kind of emotions, that helped citizens discriminate between dangerous and beneficial

emotions, and that equipped them to resist the organized emotional manipulation endemic to modern life.

This was not the first time that Russell had concluded a book with a paean to the emotions, as the penultimate paragraph of *The Scientific Outlook* had emphasized their moral value. There Russell argued that the emotions give value to human knowledge, including that obtained through science. "The new powers that science has given to man," he argued, "can only be wielded safely by those who, whether through the study of history or through their own experience of life, have acquired some reverence for human feelings and some tenderness towards the emotions that give colour to the daily existence of men and women" [29] (pp. 277–278). He then underscored this point, giving the emotions pride of place in the knowing–feeling–willing triad we have seen:

> ...it must become an essential part of men's ethical outlook to realize that the will alone cannot make a good life. Knowing and feeling are equally essential ingredients both in the life of the individual and in that of the community. Knowledge, if it is wide and intimate, brings with it a realization of distant times and places, an awareness that the individual is not omnipotent or all-important, and a perspective in which values are seen more clearly than by those to whom a distant view is impossible. Even more important than knowledge is the life of the emotions. A world without delight and without affection is a world destitute of value. [29] (p. 278)

Russell thus depicted the healthy democratic psyche as one in which properly trained reason and properly formed emotions were mutually supportive, but he saw in fascist societies how a functioning reason–emotion dynamic could be fundamentally compromised. Most obviously, the rise of fascism revealed how susceptible to emotional manipulation even an educated electorate could be. But Russell did not charge fascists simply with elevating emotions at the expense of reason. More deeply worrying was how fascists had perverted or bypassed both of these capacities: "They seek the good in *will* rather than in feeling or cognition..." [31] (p. 91)[11]. The fundamental crisis in fascist societies was not that emotion had trumped reason (though this had happened with some citizens), but rather that fascist leaders and apologists had cast both aside in favor of nationalistic self-assertion. The rise of fascism thus warned of two ways in which a Britain's emotional integrity could be compromised: the feelings of its citizens could be manipulated by unscrupulous leaders, but even worse, the reason–emotion dynamic could be not merely upset, but transcended entirely by the ideological will to power.

4. Susan Stebbing: Thinking with the Whole Personality

Though Russell dealt with the reason–emotion–citizenship dynamic frequently in his interwar writings, it remained for him but one of several cultural concerns that occupied his attention. For other philosophers, however, the issue assumed a central place in their thinking and writing. One of these was Susan Stebbing (1885–1943), who in the second half of the 1930s devoted much of her philosophic effort to improving the British public's ability to think clearly, which also meant their ability to harness emotion in the service of arriving at sound conclusions. Over the last ten to fifteen years, a growing amount of published research on Stebbing has appeared, as scholars have shown increasing interest in her life and work. This emerging literature is becoming steadily more diverse: work that has sought to explicate her thought or clarify her place in the history of philosophy is now being supplemented by research that attempts to locate her in a broader cultural context[12]. Stebbing was the first woman to hold a chair in philosophy at a British university, an influential figure in the early analytic movement, and a builder and shaper of educational and philosophical institutions[13]. She helped to found the influential journal *Analysis* and was a respected and incisive presence on the philosophical scene: chastened indeed was the mediocre philosopher on the receiving end of one of Stebbing's withering book reviews.

Even as Stebbing was working to professionalize a discipline that many deemed increasingly esoteric in its concerns, she was dogged by a growing concern about the poor reasoning capacity of the British public. This unease stemmed not just from her observations of the domestic scene, but also from what she saw happening in Europe as a whole, where democracies were giving way to dictatorship and another war seemed more likely by the year. Her anxiety is of course evident in her published writings, but it is even more starkly articulated in her private correspondence, which from the mid-1930s is interspersed with comments such as, "The European situation is, as usual, hopeless. I wonder how long we shall survive" [38]. All of this drove her to the following conclusion: "I am convinced of the urgent need for a democratic people to think clearly without the distortions due to unconscious bias and unrecognized ignorance" [16] (p. 5).

Consequently, Stebbing devoted a great deal of her intellectual effort in the 1930s to helping her fellow Britons develop what she called the "habit of sound reasoning," and this included defending the role of the emotions in the processes of thinking and democratic decision-making [39] (p. vii). The result was three non-academic books: *Logic in Practice* (1934), *Philosophy and the Physicists* (1937), and *Thinking to Some Purpose* (1939). A fourth, *Ideals and Illusions* (1941), appeared during the war but built on themes developed in her earlier popular works. Stebbing approached her non-academic writing differently than did Russell. Indeed, her correspondence suggests that she did not think much of Russell's popular works, which she felt did not do his talents justice[14]. Where Russell pronounced and generalized, Stebbing sought to engage the minds of her readers by offering them actual examples of muddled thinking to analyze and think through. If Stebbing was truly interested in inculcating the habit of sound reasoning, what better way to do this than to offer readers a chance to cut their analytical teeth on illustrations drawn from politicians' speeches, newspaper articles, readers' letters to newspapers, and actual expressions of dogmatism from across the political spectrum? Stebbing's popular writing is rife with such examples, which give her work a liveliness, practicality, and relatability that is not found in Russell's comparable works. In further contrast with Russell, when Stebbing does include the odd literary or historical reference, it is not allusive or patronizing, but relevant and fully explained for the benefit of the uninformed[15]. The inviting impression given by Stebbing's non-academic writings is underscored by her disarming authorial voice, which manages to give the impression that she is both a trustworthy guide to clear thinking and a person who struggles just as much as her readers to think her way through modern life. When Stebbing writes, for example, "Both you and I make this sort of mistake. . .", it is easy for readers to feel they are in sympathetic company [16] (p. 51). Though it may seem a small thing, a pattern of such encouraging asides laced throughout an entire book—and Stebbing's popular writings do indeed exhibit this pattern—can do much to engage and encourage the reader. Thus, Stebbing's approach to her non-academic writing—which evinced humility, curiosity, an attempt to balance between reason and emotion, and the sense of sharing in a common democratic project—modeled some of the very democratic virtues that she hoped to encourage.

The view of the reason–emotion dynamic that she articulated in her writings for a general readership in some respects echoed Russell's: emotion could in some circumstances be "the soft underbelly of reason" (to borrow a phrase from Stephen Gaukroger [41]), but in other circumstances could buttress it. For Stebbing, acknowledging and properly cultivating the integral relationship between reason and emotion was essential to developing habits and desires that were conducive to productive democratic citizenship. Put another way, Stebbing's popular philosophy of the 1930s became increasingly concerned with personhood: her discussions of "sound reasoning" and the responsibilities of citizenship became in the end discussions of the nature of persons and of their responsibilities toward one another. We can understand her work in this period in part as an attempt to articulate a particular vision of the citizen–self that could help democracy endure.

Stebbing argued that the two great enemies of sound reasoning were ignorance and "passion and emotional attitudes which check clear-sighted apprehension" [39] (p. 11). She

saw her age as one in which the distorting effects of emotion were apparent in many areas of life, from relations between neighbors, to relations between politicians and citizens, to relations between nations; it is notable in her books that she finds examples of this tendency in many different areas of human endeavor. Stebbing saw a particularly worrying example of the dangers of emotion in what seemed to be the growing tendency of the scientist, typically "regarded as the exemplar of rationality", to advance ideas through emotional manipulation, a trend that Russell had also noted in the early 1930s [39] (p. 11).

Stebbing's frustration with the sloppy thinking of leading scientists drove her to write *Philosophy and the Physicists* in 1937, a book that subjected popularizing explanations of modern physics to a forensic deconstruction. One of the key problems with the bestsellers produced by scientific luminaries like Arthur Eddington and James Jeans was that they "do not seem to realize that their subject has an intrinsic interest for the common reader, and accordingly they seek to arouse his emotions, thereby inducing a frame of mind inimical to intellectual discernment. Popularizations of such a kind constitute a grave danger to thinking clearly" [42] (p. 5). Eddington was a chief offender: "His mode of approach, born of emotion finding its outlet in vague metaphysical expressions, is surely not characteristic of the scientifically-minded" [42] (p. 16). Such an approach resulted in misrepresentations of, for example, quantum mechanics, thus giving the non-scientific reader a false impression of quantum theory and its implications: "Those who have sought to draw far-reaching philosophical conclusions from modern theories of matter have, it seems to me, not unfrequently [sic] fallen into gross confusions…" [42] (p. 267). This muddling might not pose a danger to democracy were it not for the fact that the scientists concerned sought to justify certain political and moral positions by grounding them in the findings of modern physics. Of particular concern for Stebbing, the desire to find God, Mind, or Spirit in the gaps of modern physics could all too easily become a way for human beings to evade responsibility for problems they themselves—not mysterious Nature—had caused. Is it not odd, she asked, that people should look for hope in the mysteries of physics? She answered her own question by considering the conditions that might make such an intellectual move appealing: "Perhaps it seems less odd when we reflect upon the history of mankind, the hopeless mess that we have made of human lives. Our greed, our stupidity and lack of imagination, our apathy, these are the factors upon which the present sorry state of the world is largely consequent" [42] (p. 286).

Yet, Stebbing never sought to quarantine the emotions from the reasoning process. Rather, she emphasized that thinking was done by *persons* and not by logic-chopping machines; emotions were in fact essential to sound thinking, provided that they were integrated into a truth-oriented process of evaluating evidence. She thus sought to forestall the charge that the practice of clear thinking precluded emotional engagement, writing in *Thinking to Some Purpose*:

> I do not in the least wish to suggest that it is undesirable for us to be set on thinking by emotional considerations. On the contrary, nothing else will suffice to make us think to some purpose. Nor do I wish to suggest that the presence of a strong emotion is incompatible with thinking clearly. Certainly the more strongly we feel the more difficult it is to take account of what is alone relevant. But the difficulty may be overcome, provided that we also desire to reach sound conclusions… I would say…that it is not emotion that annihilates the capacity to think clearly, but the urge to establish a conclusion in harmony with the emotion and regardless of the evidence. [16] (p. 45)

She also emphasized that thinking was done by specific persons with unique personalities, not by individuals who simply activated a rational faculty: "We do not think with a part of ourself. Our thinking involves our whole personality. *How* I think is conditioned by the kind of person I am, whosoever 'I' may stand for. The word 'person' is used here in the same sense as it is used in such expressions as 'He is a person to be avoided', or 'He is a person worth knowing'" [16] (p. 23)[16]. This was a point she was at pains to reiterate. A few pages later she reminds her readers, "It is, we need to remember, persons who think, not

purely rational spirits" [16] (p. 26). And yet again: "At this point we need to remember that it is persons who think, and, therefore, persons who argue. *I* think, not *something* thinks in me. My intellect does not function apart from the rest of my personality. This is a statement about all thinking beings" [16] (p. 36)[17]. Viewed through the prism of human personality, then, education for sound reasoning could be understood not merely as a matter of guiding citizens to master rules of logic or develop certain critical faculties, but also as a matter of shaping the will and refining or controlling the emotions in order to form personalities that reasoned well.

What could keep emotion properly in check, so that it fortified reason within a productive equilibrium? The key, Stebbing seemed to suggest, was properly ordered desire. Note the turn in the extended passage from *Thinking to Some Purpose* quoted above: strong emotion could in some circumstances pose a threat to sound reasoning, but the difficulty could be overcome "provided that we also *desire* to reach sound conclusions" [16] (p. 45)[18]. Thus, for Stebbing, the question of the reason–emotion dynamic implied an additional set of questions about how best to form and educate citizens so that they could build a democratic society "worthy of habitation by beings who aspire to be rational and are capable of love" [42] (p. 286). And because the great obstacle to achieving such a vision was "the feebleness of our desires for the good" [42] (p. 286), those feeble desires would require strengthening. The democratic citizen would be neither a dispassionate reasoner nor a self-regarding creature of the passions, but rather a person in full in whom reason and emotion were held in productive equilibrium by desire for the good. This was the conception of the citizen–self that was emerging in Stebbing's work of the 1930s, and, as she herself was aware, it was a lofty vision. "Democracy", she wrote in *Ideals and Illusions*, her last major work of public philosophy, "demands a great deal of the citizen" [43] (p. 151). Her conception of how to meet those demands was, as some sympathetic observers noted at the time, incomplete[19]. We are thus left to wonder how she would have developed this dimension of her thought had she enjoyed Russell's longevity and lived beyond the Second World War.

5. John Macmurray: Emotional Rationality

We have seen that Russell and Stebbing were grappling with the relationship between the reason–emotion dynamic on the one hand and democratic citizenship on the other. The thinker who confronted this problem most prolifically in the 1930s was almost certainly John Macmurray (1891–1976), who for much of that decade was one of Britain's most prominent and active public philosophers. After several years teaching philosophy at Oxford, Macmurray took a chair at University College, London in 1928. Over the next decade, he would establish himself as a professional philosopher capable of engaging the interest of the public, thanks in part to his skills as a lecturer and broadcaster[20]. In fact, the two books in which he developed his theory of emotional rationality, *Freedom in the Modern World* (1932) and *Reason and Emotion* (1935), had their origins in BBC radio talks and public lectures.

Thus, Macmurray was one of the most able and influential public philosophers of the interwar period, one who seemed able to tackle profound questions in candid, straightforward prose. One of Macmurray's great gifts as a writer was his ability to convey the sense that he was caught with his readers in the same vexing modern predicament. This gift was evident, for example, in his calculated use of rhetorical questions to carry the reader with him as he developed an argument. As he tries to pin down the nature of modern discontent, for example, he asks: "What is it? What is the matter with us that prevents us from standing up like men and laughing at the ghosts that haunt our sick fancies? Why are we making such a mess of things when all the circumstances are in our favour" [3] (p. 6)? Like Stebbing, Macmurray uses quotidian examples (such as problems that arise in the context of marriage or friendship) to great effect, though his are often of his own invention rather than drawn from the pages of a newspaper. He also makes frequent reference to shared historical experiences—the Great War, the General Strike—and to cultural

touchstones, such as the Bible. Combined with a colloquial style that he honed for the purpose of teaching undergraduates and broadcasting radio talks, such techniques made Macmurray an adept popular communicator—though one, as his biographer documents, quite as capable of provoking angry disagreement as of inspiring devoted admiration[21].

Using his talents as a both a philosopher and a communicator, in the 1930s, Macmurray sought to reorient modern philosophy by developing a new understanding of the nature of persons that was refracted through his Christian convictions and socialist–communitarian political inclinations[22]. As Macmurray explained to a friend in 1929, he was essentially seeking to reconstruct modern philosophy on the basis of "recognizing the objectivity of persons as the fundamental fact of our experience... This is really my starting point—that persons exist and are real in and through communion..." quoted in [46] (p. 171). His personalist philosophy was thus built on the premise that "personality is essentially mutual; that it exists only in and through personal relationships" [48] (p. 127). Macmurray's emphasis on the mutuality of personhood entailed a similar emphasis on the social dimension of human life. Consequently, his philosophy was deeply concerned with identifying and encouraging the societal and relational conditions necessary to foster authentic, truly reciprocal human relationships.

Macmurray's conception of personhood was tied to a further claim that truly rational thought was possible only through the integration of reason and emotion in a reciprocal bond he termed "emotional rationality"[23]. This concept, which he progressively developed in *Freedom in the Modern World*, *Interpreting the Universe*, and *Reason and Emotion*, rested on three linked propositions. First, Macmurray contended that "that feelings can be rational or irrational in precisely the same way as thoughts, through the correctness or incorrectness of their reference to reality" [50] (p. 11). In other words, if "reason is the capacity to behave in terms of the nature of the object, that is to say, to behave objectively" [50] (p. 7), then emotions could be objective in precisely the same way. This assertion was supported by a second claim that "reason is primarily an affair of emotion" because all activities, including the activity of thought, stem from motivations, and because all motivations arise ultimately from emotions [50] (p. 11). Developing this point, he argued, "if reason is the capacity to *act* in terms of the nature of the object, it is emotion which stands directly behind activity determining its substance and direction, while thought is related to action indirectly and through emotion, determining only its form, and that only partially" [50] (p. 11)[24]. Finally, Macmurray argued that properly calibrated emotional rationality served the ethical function of allowing people to "apprehend objective values" [50] (p. 15).

By positing the category of emotional rationality and attributing such significance to it, Macmurray was clearly inviting a host of questions about how to develop that capacity. His answers to such questions suggested a radical social vision and accorded with his view that personality is mutual and exists only through personal relationships. Emotional reason could be formed only in the context of radically authentic relationships characterized by "the mutual self-revelation of two persons to one another" [50] (p. 34). Such relationships, perhaps developed in the context of the experimental educational and social communities Macmurray made a point of supporting in the 1930s, could serve as the basis for a renewed social order. One example was the Grith Fyrd (Old English for "peace army" or "peace militia") scheme, which recruited young men from economically depressed urban areas and placed them in rural camps where cooperation and the pursuit of self-sufficiency in a rustic environment would demonstrate, it was hoped, the transformative potential of communities based on non-coercive relationships[25]. Support for such schemes was in keeping with Macmurray's belief that social conditions were ultimately a manifestation of the inner emotional life of a society's inhabitants: "The Grith Fyrd idea rests upon a psychological diagnosis of the crisis of our social life. It insists that the economic dislocation, indeed the whole economic system which we have, is itself the result, one of the results, of a derangement in our inner life" [52] (p. 6).

Macmurray's reflections on emotional rationality were thus set in the context of his conviction that the social and political difficulties facing Britain were manifestations of

an underlying emotional crisis characterized by widespread fear and a sense that the Victorians had wrongly sought to segregate reason and emotion. He interpreted this crisis as a necessary prelude to a fundamental reworking of the reason–emotion dynamic, a reintegration of two faculties that nineteenth culture had insisted on separating. Perhaps with some of his fellow philosophers in mind, Macmurray noted that many had begun to doubt the necessity of such a separation: "As soon as that doubt enters the very basis of our civilization begins to shake..." [50] (p. 5). His emotionally confused contemporaries stood witness to "the growing pains of a new world of human experience"—a new world in which the development of emotional rationality would enable more authentic relationships between persons and, ultimately, a renewed democratic order [50] (p. 6).

When Macmurray's popular philosophy of the 1930s is compared with Russell's and Stebbing's, striking similarities are immediately apparent. In all three is the view that current social and political problems have their roots in disordered emotion. Where Russell spoke of "our passions...our emotional habits...the sentiments instilled in youth, and...the phobias created in infancy" [28] (p. 247) and Stebbing of "the feebleness of our desires for the good" [42] (p. 286), Macmurray identified irrational fear—an emotion—as the great fetid source of modern discontent:

> Why can we not act greatly for the solution of our international economic problems? Why do we simply watch our social system going to pieces before our eyes? Why are we paralysed? Because we are afraid, afraid of one another, afraid of ourselves, afraid of the consequences of any decisive action. We are fear-determined, and our one demand is the fear-demand, the demand for security, for protection. Our dilemma lies in the fact that the more we try to defend ourselves the more we destroy ourselves by isolating ourselves more and more from one another... That is because it is fear that is the motive force of our efforts to solve the problem. [3] (pp. 36–37)

Likewise present in all three is the concomitant sense that social and political transformation is fundamentally a matter of training the emotions and forming citizens possessed of robust democratic affect rather than of changing laws or reforming institutions. Just as Russell and Stebbing spoke of this, each in their own idiom, so Macmurray insisted that only through "proper training of the emotions" could persons properly orient themselves to the moral values that were the basis of reality [50] (p. 37).

6. Conclusions

When we survey the work of British philosophers of the 1930s, keeping in mind that they experienced this decade as a time of crisis—of democracy, of reason, of emotion, and of many other things—it becomes difficult to overlook the prominence of certain themes in their public philosophy. The balancing of reason and emotion, the formation of character and habit, and the struggle between democracy and fascism were absolutely central concerns of many British philosophers in this fraught historical moment. Though I have concentrated here on how these concerns were present in the work of Russell, Stebbing, and Macmurray, substantial engagement with them can be found across the British philosophical landscape of this period. Take, for example, Dorothy Emmet, who would become the second woman to hold a chair in philosophy in Britain. In words that could just as easily have come from Stebbing's pen, Emmet emphasized how a good deal of reasoning, but particularly reasoning about questions of value, depends "not only on intellect, but on our whole emotional character"; straight thinking required "a certain underlying disposition of will and feeling..." [53] (pp. 95–96). Here, we see again the idea that developing the "habit of sound reasoning" was not so much a question of restraining emotion as it was a question of cultivating certain virtues, or developing a particular kind of affect, that could harness its power.

Likewise, R.G. Collingwood, as suggested at the outset of this essay, found it impossible to ignore these issues. In the mid-1930s the emotions suddenly assumed a new prominence in Collingwood's work; it is tempting to speak of this time as the period of his

"emotional turn." To cite some significant examples, in this period Collingwood revised his theory of history to reflect his new understanding that the history of thought "includes the history of emotions so far as these emotions are essentially related to the thoughts in question..." [54] (p. 44); in *The Principles of Art* (1938), he offered an aesthetic theory centered on the idea that artists express and thereby clarify emotions on behalf of their community, because "no community altogether knows its own heart..." [1] (p. 336); and in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940), he argued that a wave of irrationalism was submerging much of Europe and echoed Stebbing's concerns about how a balanced relationship between reason and emotion was foundational to the maintenance of democracy.

Collingwood was particularly scandalized by the way in which the traditional connection between the study and the practice of morality had been severed. Such an education left students without "ideals to live for and principles to live by", and, lacking such a lodestar, they became vulnerable to emotional manipulation [55] (p. 48). It was this sorry state of affairs that was Collingwood's concern in the famous final paragraphs of his *Autobiography.* Here, he alleges that the weaknesses bred into British democracy by the realist philosophers in fact allowed Neville Chamberlain to emerge as an expert manipulator, with devastating, yet foreseeable, consequences:

> ...the forces which have been at work for nearly half a century corrupting the public mind, producing in it by degrees a willingness to forgo that full, prompt, and accurate information on matters of public importance which is the indispensable nourishment of a democratic society, and a disinclination to make decisions on such matters in the public-spirited frame of mind which is democratic society's lifeblood, have "trained up a generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen" to be the dupes of a politician who has so successfully "appealed to their emotions" by "promises of private gain" (the gain of personal safety from the horrors of war) that they have allowed him to sacrifice their country's interests, throw away its prestige, and blacken its name in the face of the world.... [55] (pp. 166–167)

In other words, a moral corruption of the democratic polity was intrinsically linked to the failure of the educational system to properly train the emotions of its citizens. Although Collingwood's approach to philosophy was in many ways fundamentally at odds with those of Russell, Stebbing, and Macmurray, on this set of issues, they shared much common ground, and they shared as well as an eagerness to canvass these issues in works of philosophy intended for non-professional audiences. Surely these commonalities suggest that there are unexplored intellectual currents here worthy of the attention of philosopher and historian alike.

Accordingly, there are many further questions that could be asked about how philosophers treated the question of emotion in these years. Which traditions did they draw on and adapt, for there were many that might have furnished apt intellectual resources? These include a classical tradition that emphasized regulating the passions through reason, an Augustinian tradition that spoke of ordering the affections, and a Humean tradition that viewed reason as ultimately a servant of the passions. There is also the question of how a measured endorsement of emotion could license or underpin a range of sociopolitical visions. One reason that the idea of balancing or integrating reason and emotion connected otherwise intellectually disparate figures is certainly that the idea itself has limited ideological content. It does not imply obvious conclusions about how to structure society, reform an economy, or relate to one's neighbors. Moreover, to say that the emotions must be properly trained is to leave open the entire question of how that is to be done. For Macmurray, the answer lay in genuine friendship, whereas others emphasized the formative power of parents, educators, voluntary associations, or institutions. And, speaking of institutions, what role did they—churches, professional organizations, schools, and the like—play in shaping debate on these issues? Further investigation of such questions would do much to illuminate the place of emotions in the philosophical landscape of the interwar period and beyond.

Investigation along these lines would lead naturally to consideration of how the concept of the person figured in the philosophy of this era. As the philosophers surveyed here were eager to remind their readers, to speak of the emotions and their relationship to reason is, unavoidably, to speak also of persons. Intellectual and cultural historians have shown increasing interest in how, from the crisis of the 1930s on, "the person" and kindred concepts shaped the cultural politics of the twentieth century. This trend has gained much of its impetus from Samuel Moyn's studies of personalism in the transwar period[26]. Moyn's penetrating examinations of how the anti-totalitarian personalist philosophy of thinkers such as Jacques Maritain came to serve as a somewhat unlikely seedbed for modern human-rights discourse have been complemented by a series of recent studies. In *The Moral Economists*, Tim Rogan has revealed how, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, a collection of figures from diverse intellectual backgrounds—R.H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, and E.P. Thompson—developed a critique of capitalism in which "[t]he precept that human personality held infinite value" played a central role, contrasting sharply with a prevailing utilitarian view of human beings as utility-maximizing agents [58] (pp. 8–9). Similarly, Mark Greif has recently documented the pervasiveness of "crisis of man discourse" over the same period and has dated its emergence to the 1930s. In that decade, philosophers began urgently—even desperately—to ask "what man was, in what part of himself he should have steady faith, and how he had come to this pass" [59] (p. 7). Finally, Alan Jacobs's *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* [60] has drawn attention to how, in the shadow of the Second World War, personalist concerns went hand-in-hand with debates about how best to educate democratic citizens. Given this emerging interest in persons, it is perhaps fitting to think more about how their constituent capacities—such as the emotions—were understood, contested, and reframed in the cultural politics of the twentieth century and beyond.

Notes

1. Portions of this article were presented in a talk given at the 2019 International Society for Intellectual History conference "Revolutions & Evolutions in Intellectual History" held at the University of Queensland. The author would like to thank attendees for their constructive comments and questions. The author would also like to thank Sana Konishi-Atwood for able assistance with research for this article and Special Collections staff at the University of Edinburgh Library and at the Royal Holloway, University of London Library for their help in accessing holdings related to John Macmurray and Susan Stebbing, respectively.

2. The *Journal of Philosophical Studies* would become *Philosophy* in 1931, although issues that precede the change are conventionally referenced under the new title.

3. For a forensic examination of the idea that British democracy was in crisis during this period, see Middleton [6]. For a more general survey of this period focusing on the theme of crisis, see Overy [7].

4. Emphasis in original.

5. See also Olechnowicz [10].

6. See also Walker [13], the report on the conference published the following year.

7. The quotations are from Thouless [15]. This was a book that Susan Stebbing appreciated and indeed cites in Stebbing [16]. The other texts mentioned are Field [17], Simon and Hubback [18], Levy [19], Jepson [20], and Mander [21]. On citizenship education more broadly, see Heater [22], Simon [23], and Beaven and Griffiths [24].

8. Simon was an industrialist and sometime Liberal MP. On his citizenship education initiatives, see Ku [25].

9. See for example [28] (pp. 24–25).

10. Cf. Russell [29]: "At the period when I received what was in those days called an education, psychology was still, to all intents and purposes, a branch of philosophy. Mental events were divided into knowing, willing, and feeling" (p. 178).

11   Emphasis in original.

12   For some representative recent examples of work that elucidates Stebbing's thought and contextualizes it within the history of philosophy, see Beaney [32], West [33], West [34], Tuboly [35], and Janssen-Lauret [36]. Like Chapman's essential biography [14] of Stebbing, Körber [37] is an example of recent work that situates Stebbing in a broader cultural context and highlights her concern with issues that transcended the world of professional philosophy.

13   Stebbing's talents as an institution builder were evident in, for example, her development of Bedford College and its philosophy department, her efforts as a teacher at and proprietor of Kingsley Lodge School for Girls, and her role in founding both *Analysis* and *Modern Quarterly*.

14   One of Stebbing's letters to her friend Ann Hook [40] offers a perceptive analysis of Russell's personality and work.

15   See, for example, her reference to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in [16] (p. 26).

16   Emphasis in original.

17   Emphasis in original.

18   My emphasis. This passage echoes a similar idea expressed in [39] (p. vii and p. 11).

19   Two notable examples of sympathetic criticism are MacDonald [44] Spender [45].

20   The story of Macmurray's life, including his prominence as a broadcaster in the 1930s and beyond, is ably told in Costello [46].

21   See Costello [46] (pp. 179–187) for a discussion of Macmurray's 1930s BBC talks and the reaction to them.

22   On Macmurray's links to the communitarian tradition, see Bevir and O'Brien [47].

23   For a fuller discussion of how Macmurray developed this concept in the context of widespread anxieties about British democracy, see Sterenberg [49].

24   Emphasis in original.

25   On Grith Fyrd and other camp-based schemes for social renewal, see Field [51].

26   See, for example, Moyn [56,57].

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