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William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xiv + 380 pp. \$70 U.S. (cl); ISBN 0-521-80303-9. \$25 U.S. (pb); ISBN 0-521-00472-1.

Review by Jeremy D. Popkin, University of Kentucky.

William Reddy's *The Navigation of Feeling* is a complex and ambitious book. Reddy offers a new interpretation of the main lines of French history from 1700 to 1850, but his work also has a theoretical dimension whose scope goes well beyond the field of French history. Drawing on recent work in cognitive psychology and cultural anthropology, Reddy proposes a new approach to the study of emotions, one that he sees as offering new possibilities for the understanding of historical phenomena and also grounds for a new universalist "defense of human liberty" (p. xii). In developing his argument, Reddy moves beyond the social sciences and into the realm of philosophy, critiquing post-structuralism and offering an important extension to speech-act theory. The first half of the book is couched in general terms, but in the second half, "Emotions in History: France, 1700-1850," Reddy applies his theoretical approach to the specific question of the changes in "emotional regimes" in France from Louis XIV's reign to the July Monarchy. French history serves both as a case study buttressing parts of Reddy's general argument and as an opportunity for him to demonstrate how the political and philosophical criteria offered by his theory can be applied to specific historical situations. Both aspects of Reddy's work call for careful consideration. In Part I of this review, I will evaluate the theoretical framework Reddy proposes for the understanding of emotion; Part II will treat his interpretation of French history.

### Part I

Reddy begins by looking at the recent approaches to the analysis of emotion in the field of cognitive psychology. Scholars in that field speak of a recent "revolution in the study of emotions" that has made it, as Reddy concludes, "difficult to sustain the distinction between thought and affect" (p. 31). Emotions can no longer be regarded as inherently irrational on the grounds that they do not follow the linear patterns of rational thought or because they seem to have some of the involuntary character of the physiological arousal that often accompanies them. Nor are emotional responses now regarded as aspects of a biologically determined human nature. They can be learned and unlearned, although such learning is not easy and "an individual cannot, therefore, fashion or refashion just any emotion or any set of emotions he or she wishes" (p. 32).

The idea that emotions are learned seems to point toward a "constructivist" notion of emotional responses as culturally determined, an approach which, as Reddy (who holds a joint appointment in history and cultural anthropology at Duke University) goes on to show, has a good deal of support among cultural anthropologists. Anthropologists have found that there is considerable variation in emotional codes among cultures, but Reddy is highly critical of the way in which they have dealt with the question of the social construction of such codes. In his view, "Virtually all of this work lacks historical depth and political coherence..." (p. 45). If individuals' emotional responses are seen as entirely determined by the cultures in which they are embedded, Reddy contends, it becomes impossible

to see individuals as active agents in the shaping of their own lives, and it also becomes impossible to see how historical change originates from within such closed, self-reproducing structures. The cultural anthropologists' approach to emotion also threatens to lead to a complete relativism in which it becomes impossible to find a basis for distinguishing between more and less oppressive sets of emotional rules.

Having assessed the contributions that cognitive psychology and cultural anthropology make to the understanding of emotions, Reddy next makes an excursion into philosophical theory to lay the basis for an approach that will draw on psychology and anthropology but avoid the weaknesses he sees in both. While he wants to avoid what he sees as the vestiges of Cartesian mind/body dualism that persist in many cognitive psychologists' efforts to account for emotions, he nevertheless resists post-structuralist claims that the only alternative to such dualism is to abandon the concept of the autonomous individual altogether. Reddy tackles post-structuralism by attacking the claim that language is a "prison house" of arbitrarily designated signifiers, incapable of providing true access to the realities they are supposed to signify. He proposes to replace the signifier/signified relationship with the notion of translation, which acknowledges that language may give us a more or less accurate version of what it describes, but not one that is completely arbitrary. The concept of translation also restores a notion of individual agency: it allows Reddy to see the self as "a site where messages arrive in many different languages or codes, and where some of the messages are successfully translated into other codes, while others are not" (p. 80). In particular, this notion allows for the possibility that emotional feelings can be successfully "translated" into utterances that allow for communication.

At this point, Reddy is finally able to propose a working definition of emotions as essentially "translations" of "loosely linked thought material that tends to be activated simultaneously... and that is too large to be translated into action or utterance over a brief time horizon" (p. 111; this is a summary of a longer definition on p. 94). Emotions are the expression of a "disaggregated self" (p. 95) which is neither the coherent, rational ego of Cartesian theory nor the arbitrary illusion posited by post-structuralist theorists. Reddy now moves into a discussion of the branch of philosophy known as speech-act theory. Individuals express or translate their emotions into verbal statements, but Reddy contends that such statements do not fit into the existing categories of speech acts. They are neither descriptive ("constative") statements about the way the world is, nor "performative" statements that actually change conditions (in the way that the exchange of vows in a wedding ceremony creates a marriage). Reddy proposes to label statements about emotional states as "emotives," and he emphasizes in particular their "self-exploring or self-altering effect" (p. 100): speaking of one's emotions may in fact alter them. By making such statements, individuals act on themselves and on the world. The possibility of making emotive statements is therefore a condition of individual agency.

With this scaffolding in place, Reddy is finally prepared to explain the political significance of his argument. He now defines individual freedom as the right to engage in the "navigation" of one's emotions, to attempt to define one's own course. Emotional liberty is the "freedom to change goals in response to bewildering, ambivalent thought activations that exceed the capacity of attention and challenge the reign of high-level goals currently guiding emotional management. This is freedom, not to make rational choices, but to undergo conversion experiences and life-course changes involving numerous, contrasting, often incommensurable factors" (p. 122-3). Different "emotional regimes" give individuals greater or lesser room to do this. In strict regimes, individuals' permitted emotional responses are largely dictated from the outside, which may provide a certain reassurance but also produces a rigidity that prevents adaptation to change. Loose emotional regimes give individuals flexibility, but may make it difficult for them to define a coherent course for their lives. Nevertheless, Reddy is convinced that strict regimes "offer, in the end, an incomplete and contradictory vision of human nature and human possibilities" and that they constitute "a political failure that can only be rejected" (p. 126-7). In his view, this understanding of emotions and their relationship to the individual provides a universal standpoint that is neither ethnocentric nor dependent on an untenable notion of the

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rational, autonomous self. The goal of any social or political system should be “reducing emotional suffering to the necessary minimum...” (p. 127).

Reddy’s approach to emotions shares some features with that of the philosopher and classicist Martha Nussbaum, whose *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* was also published in 2001.[1] Like Reddy, Nussbaum argues for the cognitive content of emotions, for seeing them as “essential elements of human intelligence...” (p. 3), and she, too, sees political significance in this fact, insisting that “not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety” is one of the “capabilities” that every society ought to guarantee to its citizens (p. 417). The differences between the two books are also important, however. Whereas Reddy draws essentially on psychological research concerning adults, Nussbaum sees emotional life as developing out of childhood experiences and as being rooted in emotions’ “appropriateness to the life of an incomplete creature in a world of significant accidents” (p. 178). She also sees some value in the Freudian tradition, which Reddy largely ignores. Nussbaum’s book, written in a much more personal vein than Reddy’s more analytical treatment, gives more insight into the power of emotions and the ambivalences they often express.

In general, the tone of Nussbaum’s argument is also more optimistic about the human condition than that of Reddy. Both stand in the liberal tradition of support for individual rights, broadly defined, but the political program of *The Navigation of Feeling* is framed essentially in negative terms—“reducing emotional suffering to the necessary minimum” (p. 127)—whereas that of *Upheavals of Thought* is considerably broader, including protection for life, health, bodily integrity, freedom to use one’s senses and reason, and even such ideals as “being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities” (p. 416-8). Acutely conscious of anthropological critiques of western notions of human rights as ethnocentric or gender-biased, Reddy seems to feel compelled to keep his political claims modest; Nussbaum, whose sources are almost entirely from the western tradition, is highly sensitive to gender issues, but she is more confident in her insistence that the natural-rights tradition can be made genuinely universalistic.

In addition to his greater sensitivity to the danger of ethnocentricity, Reddy goes further than Nussbaum in seeking to integrate the study of emotions into a social-science framework, and his analysis of “emotive” statements is an important and original extension of speech-act theory. *The Navigation of Feeling* also offers some suggestive and original ways of looking at historical issues. The concept of “emotional regimes” may not be completely original. The French utopian socialist Charles Fourier already saw the “psychological pains” inflicted by industrial society as its worst feature, and Reddy’s description of the emotional pressure created by the reign of Terror is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt’s description of the “iron band” gripping individuals in twentieth-century totalitarian states.[2] But assessing historical societies in terms of the emotional constraints they impose on their members is a fruitful way of illuminating the connections between individual and collective experience, and Reddy has demonstrated that it can offer important insights. In its theoretical aspect, *The Navigation of Feeling* is an important contribution to ongoing debates about the possibility of finding criteria for the good life that are independent of culture and of dualistic assumptions about mind and body.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear that Reddy’s argument will achieve his goal of converting determined cultural relativists. Just as there are groups, such as medieval penitents, who found spiritual value in physical pain, there may be groups, and even whole cultures, for whom emotional suffering is not the greatest evil. It is also not clear how Reddy proposes to measure the extent of emotional suffering inflicted by a particular regime. Both he and Nussbaum comment on the anthropologist Unni Wikan’s study of the emotional regime in Bali, where so much stress is put on the necessity of maintaining a cheerful, positive demeanor that grief for the loss of a loved one cannot be expressed. Does this mean that the Balinese suffer from an extreme form of emotional repression from which they need to be liberated? Or does their unwillingness to indulge in grief protect them from the pain that westerners experience? Reddy concedes that some emotional regimes which combine “coercion and liberty” (p. 331) have seemed to be satisfying to the majority of those who live under them; how is one to

draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable degrees of emotional constraint? Reddy claims that he is not putting forward western liberal responses to these issues as a model—he calls the western tradition “a promising, although variegated, failure of world-historical proportions” (p. 137)—but the solution he proposes still seems closely wedded, for better or for worse, to the assumptions of western individualism.

## Part II

In the second half of *The Navigation of Feeling*, Reddy uses the theoretical framework he has constructed to analyze the emotional regimes that succeeded each other in France from 1700 to 1850. He seeks to determine how much emotional freedom the French enjoyed under each of them, and to measure the impact that attitudes toward emotions had on historical events. Reddy has not chosen this period of French history arbitrarily. In his view, it constitutes a crucial moment for the study of emotions. “For a few decades,” Reddy writes, “emotions were deemed to be as important as reason in the foundation of states and the conduct of politics. After 1794, not only was this idea rejected, even its memory was extinguished” (p. 143). France was thus the site of unusually significant experiments in the social management of emotional expression and then of a reaction against emotional expression that deeply affected all of western thought. Its history therefore offers a unique opportunity for the application of the theoretical insights he proposes.

The narrative of French history Reddy lays out is not entirely unfamiliar. In effect, he takes a more or less standard account of the period he covers and “translates” it, to use his term, by focusing on emotional regimes rather than political or intellectual ones. Louis XIV, the consummate absolutist, used his power to impose an elaborate code of court etiquette that served as a powerful means of social control. Individuals who wanted to enjoy the king’s favor had to manage their emotions appropriately, and violators incurred severe emotional suffering. In reaction to this rigidity, many individuals turned to a private sphere—not, as in the familiar theory of Jürgen Habermas, one based on the exercise of reason, but one that provided an “emotional refuge” within which individuals could express themselves more freely and establish non-hierarchical relationships.[3] In salons, Masonic lodges and cafés, and the love-based marriages celebrated in the period’s literature, emotions as well as ideas could be voiced more openly. The participants in this private domain embraced the new doctrine of sentimentalism elaborated by English thinkers, particularly the earl of Shaftesbury. Just as historians of the Enlightenment have traditionally insisted that French thinkers gave British ideas about reason a more radical political edge, so Reddy argues that the French drew sharper political conclusions from these imported ideas about emotion. They contrasted the naturalness and sincerity of personal emotions with the artificiality of public culture.

As this tendency intensified toward the end of the century, however, the cult of sentiment developed dangerous tendencies. “The difference between art and life was attenuated...” (p. 164), leading to unrealistic expectations, and “lack of sincerity ... came widely to be regarded as a certain sign of evil intent” (p. 172). The French Revolution, often seen as an example of the excesses of abstract reason, becomes in Reddy’s account a demonstration instead of the excesses of sentimentalism. What “began as an effort to transform all of France, by means of benevolent gestures of reform, into a kind of emotional refuge” turned ugly when “the eighteenth century’s misunderstanding of emotions, coupled with the paradoxical effort to enlist the coercive power of the state in the service of benevolence and generosity, transformed the emotional refuge aimed at in 1789, in four short years, into the acute emotional suffering of the Terror” (p. 147). The Terror was implemented by intense pressure to voice the politically correct emotions of love of country and hatred of aristocrats, but the fear and emotional suffering it induced “also began to sap the very power of those emotives that had rendered sentimentalism so persuasive in the first place” (p. 196), a conclusion reached at the time by Saint-Just when he made his famous complaint that “the Revolution is frozen.” This set the stage for a reaction that swept away not only Robespierre but also the entire sentimentalist discourse that had developed

over the course of the century. According to Reddy, the fatal weakness of the Jacobin regime was its demand that everyone, at all times, exhibit the emotional sincerity of a virtuous patriot. Unable to entirely deny their conflicting feelings, individuals became acutely aware of their inability to live up to this demand, with the result that no one could feel secure. "Thus, all were made into traitors," Reddy writes, concluding that his approach makes "a point that neither class analysis nor cultural interpretation alone can provide any grounds for" (p. 210).

Under Napoleon, sincerity ceased to be a public value; in exchange for conforming to the Emperor's dictates in public, individuals were given a greater range of freedom in their private lives, a system "far more in tune with the givens of emotional life as the theory of emotives reveals them" (p. 203). With the notable exception of Madame de Staël, nineteenth-century liberals not only rejected the idea of basing the political order on sentiment but also rewrote eighteenth-century history to depict their Enlightenment predecessors as consistent rationalists (p. 208). Thinkers like the philosopher Maine de Biran recognized the self as a problem and delved deeply into its mysteries, but they no longer saw the inner life of the emotions as a source of "natural" impulses that could shape institutions. Instead, they emphasized the weakness of the individual in the face of his own emotions, and the need for public institutions solidly anchored in reason. Sentiment was relegated "to a private realm of personal reflection, artistic endeavor, and interior, noncivic spaces" (p. 236).

Up to this point, Reddy's argument about emotions in France has been based largely on secondary literature—notably Sarah Maza's work on the exploitation of emotional arguments in pre-revolutionary court cases, Lynn Hunt's explanation of how the French went from loving their king to cutting off his head, and Patrice Higonnet's recent study of Jacobinism<sup>[4]</sup>—and on the writings of a few prominent intellectuals. In a final chapter, he draws on civil court cases from the period 1815-1848, sources he used to good effect in his own earlier work,<sup>[5]</sup> to look at the ways in which lawyers and their clients used the language of emotions. His conclusion is that post-revolutionary society allowed a "greater ease of navigation" through the thickets of emotion than its predecessors, but "at the price of a pervasive malaise, a sense of shame about the new 'bourgeois' society that found expression in myriad ways." Despite its shortcomings, "this was a more flexible, and more survivable, regime than that which the sentimentalists had attempted to build" (p. 311-3). Hence it achieved a stability that had eluded the revolutionaries.

Reddy's narrative of French history from 1700 to 1850 is suggestive, but it does raise some questions. As I have noted, the story that he tells of how the role of emotions developed closely follows the outlines of Jürgen Habermas's narrative about the rise of the public sphere, but with emotion taking the place of the critical reason that was at the center of Habermas's concerns. In many ways, Reddy's tale is even closer to that laid out in a work that strongly influenced Habermas himself: Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*.<sup>[6]</sup> Koselleck saw seventeenth-century absolutist systems themselves as having set in motion a dialectical process that ultimately led to their own destruction by claiming a monopoly on the exercise of power for the ruler while conceding to the subjects a private right of moral judgment. Over the course of the eighteenth century, that marginalized realm of private discourse turned into a tribunal claiming an absolute right to judge its sovereign. The French Revolution institutionalized that claim, with disastrous results. Koselleck's argument owed much to the writings of the influential anti-democratic thinker Carl Schmitt, to whom his book was dedicated; in particular, at that point in his career, Koselleck shared Schmitt's disdain for the introduction of moral concerns into the autonomous realm of politics.<sup>[7]</sup> Reddy's political goals are far removed from those of the Koselleck of the early 1950s, but some elements of this negative and highly teleological view of eighteenth-century moralism resurface in his own treatment.

This tendency is clearest in Reddy's treatment of the French Revolution. Like François Furet, the leader of the "revisionist" school of the 1980s—who was not directly influenced by Koselleck but who was heavily influenced by an earlier French scholar, Augustin Cochin, whose condemnation of Jacobinism is

extensively cited by both Schmitt and Koselleck--Reddy sees the Revolution from 1789 to 1794 as essentially doomed before it started because of the flaws hidden in its seemingly most attractive ideals. The dictatorial tendencies of the Terror were already inherent in the apparently libertarian rhetoric of the Revolution's early stages. Reddy's sympathies, admittedly qualified, are with the liberal regimes of the early nineteenth century, despite the sharp limits they placed on political participation and their rigidly masculinist institutions.

Another way of interpreting these issues seems possible, however. It would involve questioning the teleological framework that sees the Terror as an inevitable consequence of the attitude toward emotions adopted early in the eighteenth century and recognizing instead that the emotional consequences of both eighteenth-century sentimentalism and the Revolution could have been different. Was it not in fact the eighteenth-century sentimentalists who first posed the question of what Reddy calls emotional freedom, even if their concept of the naturalness of emotions was problematic? And was it not Diderot, in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, who most radically challenged that claim? An alternative interpretation of the history of French emotional regimes would also recognize that political traditions were not the only ones at stake in these debates. Reddy's account says nothing about religion, despite its large role in inculcating styles of emotional management and the powerful emotions unleashed by anything affecting it.

An alternative interpretation would also mean acknowledging that the revolutionaries of 1789 provided the charter for all subsequent claims of emotional freedom when they enacted Article 4 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, stating that "liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm another person." The freedom promised in this article clearly covered not only the political and economic domain but also the activities that Reddy has summed up as the navigation of emotions. The liberal divorce law of 1792, granting both men and women the right to end an unhappy marriage, was a major step toward institutionalizing emotional freedom (and one that was repealed in 1816, forcing Reddy's unhappily married nineteenth-century subjects to adopt the various expedients he analyzes in his section on legal cases). In addition to underestimating the Revolution's positive significance for emotional liberty, Reddy sometimes makes one-sided claims about the role of emotional motives in the Revolution. The "abolition of feudalism" on 4 August 1789 may have been in part "an act of sentimental benevolence" (p. 182), but it was also an effort to resolve serious social and political problems, many of which had been debated for decades, as well as a response to the very real threat of a peasant uprising. Sentimentalist effusions about the injustice of slavery, on the other hand, failed to override the practical arguments advanced by its defenders until the height of the Terror.

If Reddy's analysis of the Revolution seems excessively pessimistic, his interpretation of the first half of the nineteenth century may be overly positive. Certainly, the regimes of the period left citizens more private freedom than the Terror, and Benjamin Constant's distinction between ancient and modern liberty provided a theoretical justification for such a policy. Nevertheless, this was also the period in which the Saint-Simonians, the early feminists, and Charles Fourier formulated their searching indictments of the emotional suffering inflicted by modern society's individualism. Reddy concedes that positive attitudes toward emotion persisted among artists during this period, but they also pervaded Michelet's history-writing and the populist religious movements Edward Berenson has studied.<sup>[8]</sup> The opening stages of the Revolution of 1848 were as rich in sentimentalist effusions as any moment in the 1790s; perhaps it was the inglorious failure of that movement, more than the execution of Robespierre, that finally banished sentimentalist and romantic illusions from French public life.

The great merit of *The Navigation of Feeling* is to have brought together insights from so many different disciplines to demonstrate what is at stake in taking emotions seriously, from both a political and a historical point of view. Reddy communicates his deeply felt concern for individual emotional freedom, but he is not always as persuasive in judging which French regimes came closest to fostering it and which were most antithetical to it. Nevertheless, as this review has tried to show, Reddy has posed

many important new questions that are sure to provoke new thought on the part, not only of French historians, but of those in many other fields as well.

## NOTES

[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[2] Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 293; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1951).

[3] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

[4] Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins During the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[5] William Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France 1814-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[6] Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

[7] On the parallels between Cochin, Schmitt, and Koselleck and the echoes of this tradition in Habermas, see Jeremy D. Popkin, "The Concept of Public Opinion in the Historiography of the French Revolution: A Critique," *Storia della storiografia* 20 (1992): 77-92.

[8] Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

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See also William M. Reddy's response to Jeremy D. Popkin's review.

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