

# Emotion and Culture: Arguing with Martha Nussbaum

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**ABSTRACT** *Martha Nussbaum's account of human emotions, given in her influential 2001 book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* is, in many ways, a balanced and insightful one. Her discussion steers prudently and carefully between, on the one hand, the excesses of cultural relativism and social constructivism, and on the other, the crude universalism of biological and cognitivist accounts of emotion. And yet I do not find Nussbaum's overall account fully adequate, and, in particular, I do not think she accords sufficient weight to the role of language in emotional experience or its interpretation. She acknowledges that language differences probably\* shape emotional life in some ways, but she goes on to say that "the role of language has often been overestimated" (p. 1551)—without noting that it has also often been greatly underestimated.*

*In this article, I argue that despite her desire to strike a balance between extreme positions on emotion and culture, Nussbaum's account of human emotions errs on the side of universalism. I focus on "grief," which is her key example of a universal human emotion, and contrast the Anglo cultural perspective (some aspects of which Nussbaum assumes to be universal) with those reflected in other languages such as Russian, French, Chinese, and the Central Australian language Pintupi.*

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**M**artha Nussbaum, the distinguished philosopher, classicist, and literary scholar, is one of the most prominent polymaths on the contemporary world scene. Of her 1990 book *Love's Knowledge*, which received the PEN Spielvogel-Diamonstein Prize for the Best Collection of Essays, the *Bloomsbury Review* wrote, "With this volume Martha Nussbaum gives new meaning to the word 'interdisciplinary' " (cover). The same could be said of Nussbaum's

influential 2001 book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. *Upheavals of Thought* moves effortlessly between perspectives derived from literature, philosophy, anthropology, and psychology while at the same time drawing, with grace, courage, and perspicacity, on personal experience. The importance of this book derives not only from its intrinsic merits but also from its ability to enter into an empathetic dialogue with a very wide range of disciplines. Given the book's strongly humanist, literary and autobiographical emphases, the fact that it was well received by psychologists is particularly notable in this context (cf. Keith Oatley's [2003] survey of opinions among the members of the International Society for Research into Emotions).

Nussbaum's account of human emotions is, in many ways, a balanced and insightful one. Her discussion steers carefully between, on the one hand, the excesses of cultural relativism and social constructivism, and on the other hand, the crude universalism of biological and cognitivist accounts of emotion.

I wholeheartedly share Nussbaum's interest in the *commonalities* of human emotional experience. In my own work, I have sought to articulate those commonalities while also exploring the diversity of that experience (cf. in particular Wierzbicka 1999). I share her interest in subjective emotional experience, and her conviction that this experience is influenced, indeed shaped, by language and culture; that "differences in normative judgments affect experience itself" (p. 160). Her account of the relation between language and emotion given in the following passage seems to me both sensitive and judicious:

Language . . . is not everything in emotion: emotions can be based on other forms of symbolic representation. But the fact of language does change emotion. The fact that we label our emotions alters the emotions we can have . . . We do not simply apply terms to antecedently organized items. In the process of labelling, we are also frequently organizing, bounding some things off from others, sharpening distinctions that may have been experienced in an inchoate way. From then on, we experience our emotions in ways guided by these descriptions.

A person who does not know the emotional "grammar" of his or her society cannot be assumed to have the same emotional life as one who does know this "grammar." To be able to articulate one's emotions is *eo ipso* to have a different emotional life. [Nussbaum 2001:149]

However, I do not find Nussbaum's overall account fully adequate, and, in particular, I do not think she sufficiently emphasizes the role of language in emotional life or its interpretation. To quote her again:

*Language* differences probably shape emotional life in some ways, but the role of language has often been overestimated, and it is very difficult to estimate it correctly. For example, we should not make the common error of supposing that if there is no single term in a language for an experience, that experience must be lacking. This is just as wrong as the idea that if a word is the same the experience is likely to be the same. [p. 155]

All of this is true. But the role of language has often been *underestimated*, too. Nussbaum offers a case in point:

The fact that Greek and Roman cultures have many fine-grained words for different varieties of anger shows us that they were unusually preoccupied with that emotion. But once we read their definitions we can understand how they were individuating the kinds, and recognize examples of these kinds in our own world. Thus it would take further argument to show that the presence of a large number of distinct words really made a difference in the emotional life itself. Cicero points out that Latin has only a single word for love, *amor*, whereas Greek has a plurality of terms; and yet he expects his readers to be familiar with the different types of love identified by the Greek discussions: they are just different subtypes of *amor*, to be marked off by further qualifying words. [p. 156]

Does it indeed take further argument to show that the presence of a large number of distinct words really makes a difference in the emotional life itself? If many bilingual and bicultural people say that the existence of distinct words for emotions *has* made a difference to the texture of their emotional life, can a person who has *not* lived his or her life through two languages establish *by means of argument* that such people are wrong?

There are indeed controversies that can be resolved by argument. But surely, as far as the quality of people's inner experience is concerned, their own testimony is more valid than any arguments that a theoretician could come up with. In fact, Nussbaum herself does not try to come up with arguments countering the experience of bilingual people; rather, she challenges other theoreticians (social constructivists) to produce arguments proving that different vocabularies of emotion can make a difference to people's emotional experience. In the process, she overlooks the testimony of bilingual people themselves and appears to reverse what on the face of things should be the onus of proof.

Consider, for example, the Polish-born American writer Eva Hoffman's account of her experience of the emotion of *tesknota*—a Polish word for which there is no exact equivalent in English. [Eva and her family are standing on the ship, about to leave Poland for Canada]:

When the brass band on the shore strikes up the jaunty mazurka rhythms of the Polish anthem, I am pierced by a youthful sorrow so powerful that I suddenly stop crying and try to hold still against the pain. I desperately want time to stop, to hold the ship still with the force of my will. I am suffering my first, severe attack of nostalgia, *tesknota*—a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing. It is a feeling whose shades and degrees I am destined to know intimately, but at this hovering moment, it comes upon me like a visitation from a whole new geography of emotions, an annunciation of how much an absence can hurt. Or a premonition of absence, because at this divide, I'm filled to the brim with what I'm about to lose—images of Cracow, which I loved as one loves a person, of the sun-baked villages where we had taken summer vacations, of the hours I spent poring over passages of music with my piano teacher, of conversations and escapades with friends. [1989:4]

To give the English readers a hint of what her experience is like, Hoffman invokes the words *nostalgia*, *sorrow*, *pain*, *sadness*, *longing*, *hurt*—but above all, throughout the book, she uses the untranslatable Polish word *tesknota*. For her, *tesknota* is NOT a kind of nostalgia or a kind of sadness or a kind of grief—rather, it is an important conceptual category linked with a distinct, unique, and—in Polish culture—supremely significant and salient type of emotion. Mary Besemeres analyses the significance of the concept of “*tesknota*” in Hoffman’s memoir as follows:

while . . . the feeling seems to be the most private and indefinable of desires, it also appears to be one of the most communicable. It is something Eva is taught and expected to convey by her piano-playing, a feeling listeners can be relied on to recognize, and for which there is a special, resonant word. To this extent *tesknota* appears to be at the elusive intersection of the personal and cultural realms . . . At school in Canada and among friends in the United States alike, Hoffman feels herself to have been rigorously socialized out of a strong attachment to home. By contrast *tesknota* was positively encouraged by her education in Cracow, with its strong diet of Romantic poetry and music. *Tesknota* emerges from the range of her references to it as an important cultural concept, while being one of her innermost experiences: a “communal meaning,” in cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner’s term (1990:33), or a “vital understanding,” in that of anthropologists Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn 1987:12. [2002:46]

Besemeres explains as follows why *tesknota* occupies such a prominent place in the Polish geography of emotions:

The Romantic tradition in music and literature which Hoffman shows her child-self eagerly imbibing at school (again, with light retrospective irony, ‘those . . . cavalrymen, about whom we hear so often’) was created in the nineteenth century by Polish exiles, pre-eminently by the figures she mentions, Chopin and the poet Adam Mickiewicz. The country’s modern history was marked by a collective experience of her own deracination, with the imperial partitions of the late eighteenth century forcing several large-scale waves of emigration. *Tesknota* for the oppressed homeland was a feeling that helped to define the emerging national culture, and it went hand in hand with visions of a liberation of Poland. [2002:48]

The emotional experience of *tesknota* could justly be regarded as a leit-motif of Hoffman’s book, and her reflections on that experience should be a warning not to interpret another culture’s categories of experience as just a subtype of this or that emotion recognized lexically by English (e.g., a subtype of grief or a variety of sadness).

Nussbaum appears to endorse Cicero’s view that although Greek has a plurality of terms subdividing between themselves the territory covered in Latin by one word *amor*, the types of experience singled out by those Greek terms are just different subtypes of *amor*. But this is a Latinocentric view of the Greek conceptual universe: From a Greek cultural point of view, these are not subtypes of one category corresponding to the Latin *amor*, but distinct types of experience.

Nussbaum accepts that “it is plausible to think that the culture’s vocabulary does also shape, to some extent, its members’ sense of what is

salient in experience" (p. 156). She seems more inclined to apply this view, however, to exotic societies like the Ifaluk rather than to speakers of English: English tends to be taken as a baseline in her generalizations (just as Latin was in Cicero's). For example, she writes:

a culture that values honor highly, and attaches a strong negative value to the slighting of honor, will have many occasions for anger that an equality-focused culture such as that of the Utku will not have. . . . Societies have different normative teachings with regard to the importance of honor, money, bodily beauty and health, friendship, children, political power. They therefore have many differences in anger, envy, fear, love, and grief. [p. 157]

This offers a taxonomy of societies based on the English word *honor*: the sentence "societies have different normative teachings with respect to the importance of honor" implies that the notion of "honor" is somehow relevant to most societies and can be used as a measuring yardstick for all of them. Similarly, the view that different societies may "have many differences in ( . . . ) grief" (157) and is anglocentric because it uses the English word *grief* as a yardstick for describing human emotional experience across languages and cultures. Mutatis mutandis, what Shweder says about "sadness" applies also to "honor," "anger," "grief," and all the other parameters derived from the English language:

What should we say about the cultural relevance of the particular package of wants, beliefs, feelings and values known as "sadness"? . . . The problem with this is that all the interpretations simply presuppose the relevance of the "idea of sadness," leaving us with no empirical basis for examining the validity of that presupposition. [2001]

Nussbaum acknowledges that "emotion taxonomies themselves vary across societies" (p. 163), but she goes on to say that "all known societies have some variety of the major emotion types: love, fear, grief, anger, jealousy, envy, compassion, and some others." Does this last statement mean that all languages have some emotion terms close in meaning to those enumerated in the quote? Or that speakers of languages without such terms, nonetheless experience feelings comparable with those described in English as *grief*, *anger*, *jealousy*, and so forth?

Let us take *grief*, which is at the center of Nussbaum's attention. In my own native Polish, there is no word for *grief*. There are words comparable with *sadness*, *despair*, *suffering*, and *pain*—but there is nothing comparable with *grief*. This may seem hard to believe, but there is no word for *grief* in Russian either. There are two words in Russian glossed in dictionaries as "sadness"—*grust'* and *pečal'* (cf. Wierzbicka 1998)—and there is also a salient, widely used word *gore*, referring, very roughly, to profound, acute and ongoing sorrow, related to a great and ongoing misfortune. There is no such word in English. Nor does English have a word for *nesčastie*—the opposite of *sčastie* (happiness), but referring to a combination of an objective disaster and a great subjective unhappiness. Lest

it be thought that the absence of a word for *grief* is a Slavic peculiarity, I should point out that there is no word for *grief* in French either. There, too, there is the word *malheur*—in a sense, an opposite of *bonheur* (happiness) but referring primarily to a disaster (seen as a source of great unhappiness); and there is the word *douleur* (pain, although also more than pain). But there is no *grief*.

This difference between French and English is all the more interesting given that in her account of human emotions in general and “grief” in particular, Nussbaum draws inspiration from Proust (as she says, “I draw . . . centrally, on Proust,” [p. 7]). Yet, naturally, Proust never speaks of “grief” (for which there is no word in French), relying, rather, on the French concepts “*malheur*,” “*souffrance*,” “*douleur*,” and “*chagrin*.”

Of course, it might be pointed out that, as Nussbaum puts it, “we should not make the common error of supposing that if there is no single term in a language for an experience, that experience must be lacking” (155). But neither should we make the common error of assuming that there are universal experiences for which there happens to be a term in English even though there is not one in other languages.

If we do not give English a privileged position among the world’s languages (as a guide to human universals) then we must ask, rather, why should English have singled out the experience that it calls *grief* from the great ocean of human emotions as a subject of special attention and given it a distinct name? And equally, why does English not have a word like *malheur*, or *nesčastie*, or *gore*? Finally, why has *sorrow* become so outdated and so little used in modern English?

When one looks at English from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective the thought suggests itself that modern English has isolated the pain associated with a loved one’s death as a kind of anomaly in human life: Woes have long disappeared from common usage, ongoing sorrows have faded away, and *grief* itself has changed its meaning from a combination of misfortune and suffering seen as common in life (a bit like *hardship*, but with a more salient component of *pain*) to an acute but short-term emotion following an exceptional event (death). Although the overall semantic history of *grief* is quite complex, for the present purposes it will be sufficient to illustrate the changes in the meaning of this word with the following three examples from the Oxford English Dictionary:

1. hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness and other griefs of this world (1435)
2. Before my arrival in Aleppo, the Caravan . . . was from thence departed, which bred no small grief in my breast. (1632)
3. As fate would have it, they had the one grief of having no children. (1886) [2003]

Thus, modern English has exorcised *woes*, *sorrows* and *griefs* (in the plural) from the fabric of normal life. At the same time, “happiness” has come to be seen as the stuff of everyday life, and the word *happy* has become one of the most widely used English emotion adjectives—perhaps even the most widely used one of all. To illustrate from the COBUILD corpus (frequencies per million words):

	UK Books	US Books	UK Spoken
<i>happy</i>	143	162	144
<i>sad</i>	47	45	43
<i>joyful</i>	4	4	1

*Happy* is not only much more frequent than *sad* (roughly 3:1), but also much more frequent than, for example, the French counterpart of *happy*, that is *heureux* (roughly, 2.5:1, as the frequency of *heureux* in the French part of the COBUILD [2003] corpus is only 61 per million words).

Unlike the French word *heureux*, the Russian word *šťastlivyj*, or the German word *glücklich*, *happy* is not restricted to exceptional states (like *bliss*), but rather is seen as referring to states within everyone’s reach. There is nothing exceptional about being happy: One can be *quite* happy, one can be *reasonably* happy, one can be happy *with the arrangements*, and so forth. (The words *heureux*, *glücklich*, or *šťastlivyj* cannot be used in such collocations; cf. Wierzbicka 1999; Goddard and Wierzbicka 1998.)

Nussbaum acknowledges that cultural norms relating to emotions influence emotional experience. For example, she writes, “Finally, and perhaps most important of all, *social norms* pertinent to the emotional life vary. If emotions are evaluative appraisals, then cultural views about what is valuable can be expected to affect them very directly” (157). As we have already seen, however, she is much more skeptical about the role of language, “*Language* differences probably shape emotional life in some ways, but the role of language has often been overestimated, and it is very difficult to estimate it correctly” (157). What she does not seem to recognize is that language is the primary vehicle for the transmission, and indeed operation, of cultural norms. She emphasizes “significant differences between families and individuals” (p. 155) but she does not acknowledge the fact of shared expectations encoded in the language itself, which are *not* subject to individual variation.

For example, when she describes her own grief at the scene of her mother’s death, she says, “I wept uncontrollably” (120). Some Anglo-Americans may weep uncontrollably in certain circumstances and some may not, but they are all familiar with the phrase *to weep uncontrollably*, which carries with it the implication that people might *want* to control their emotion and their weeping. In other languages (e.g., in Polish) there are no phrases corresponding with *to weep uncontrollably* because there

is no shared assumption embedded in the language itself that people can be expected to want to control their weeping and their emotion at a death scene.

Nussbaum talks about certain “norms of grief” that “are recognizably American” (p. 168). “One is supposed to allow oneself to ‘cry big’ at times, but then American mores of self-help also demand that one gets on with one’s work, one’s physical exercise, one’s commitments to others, not making a big fuss.” (p. 140) In an American film that she discusses, “the characters all share certain norms about grief itself—that it is appropriate and good, but should not be allowed to spill over too much into the conduct of one’s life, and certainly should not blight one’s search for happiness” (p. 168). Interestingly, she links the origins of the American norms of grief with Protestant ethics:

The Balinese theory of the vital force and its enemies shapes Balinese grief, teaching people to view it as a dangerous threat to health. So too, in somewhat related ways, does the American theory (of Protestant European origin) that one can conquer all contingencies through work: grieving is thus sometimes felt as a sign that one is not making sufficient effort. [p. 153]

She does not recognize that certain norms and expectations concerning emotional experience (as well as its behavioral expression) are carried by the very word *grief* (intense but normally short-term) and by the absence of words like *malheur*, *gore*, *sorrow*, and *woe*. The very norm that grief should not be allowed to spill over too much into the conduct of one’s life is related to the modern meaning of the word *grief* itself, which suggests, as it were, a short-term suspension of normal life. And yet it is this highly culture-specific concept that is used in Nussbaum’s book as a prism through which to look at other cultures and at the human emotions in general.

Nussbaum emphasizes the differences between families and individuals and warns that it is extremely important not to generalize prematurely:

Any cultural group, studied in sufficient detail, exhibits many different practices . . . Studies of American children from different ethnic and economic backgrounds show a wide range of family styles in the areas of communication and expressiveness—as we would normally expect, since we are used to the fact that people we know are different from one another, WASP families different from Jewish families, and so forth. Some families talk a lot and some do not; some tell each other what is on their minds, others bottle up grievances. [p. 154–155]

All this is of course true, but it is not the whole story. An expression like “to weep uncontrollably” is familiar to all Americans, whether they come from WASP families, Jewish families, or any other kind of family.

Nussbaum suggests that “grief” (“the generic emotion of grief” [p. 169]) is a universal human emotion, and that, for example, “grief for the loss of a mother and thoughts of revenge against those who have damaged her are not in the least foreign to any society” (p. 170). In Polish, the word *revenge* does have a semantic equivalent in *zemsta*. But because the word



*grief* does not have an equivalent in Polish, there is no *prima facie* evidence that the concept and the type of experience that it stands for is familiar to monolingual speakers of Polish. It is easy enough to say that the absence of a word does not prove the absence of a concept, let alone the absence of an experience, but how does one prove the presence of either a concept or an experience for which there is no word?

Of course, in Poland, too, many people cry at the death of their mothers, so from the point of view of an Anglo person they may well seem to be experiencing grief—but is this a valid interpretation of a Polish person's experience? The word *grief* carries with it a conceptual scenario, a form of interpretation of what has happened. When Martha Nussbaum wept uncontrollably at the deathbed of her mother, she was able (and inclined) to interpret her experience to herself in terms of the concept “grief.” Because our feelings are colored, if not shaped, by the stories that we are telling ourselves, her feelings at the time were likely to be influenced by the cultural construct of “grief.”

As Jerome Bruner puts it, “narrative acts of self-making are usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be—and of course, shouldn't be” (2002:65). Bruner is careful to emphasize that no one is a slave to their culture. Rather, “all cultures provide presuppositions and perspectives about selfhood, rather like plot summaries or homilies for telling oneself or others about oneself” (p. 66). He quotes in this context Dan Slobin's article on the mutual influence of language and thought:

One cannot verbalize experience without taking a perspective, and . . . the language being used favours particular perspectives. The world does not present “events” to be encoded in language. Rather, in the process of speaking or writing, experiences are filtered through language into verbalized events. [Slobin 2000:107]

“Grief” is not a category of experience to be encoded in language, it is an experience already filtered through the conceptual schema of the English word *grief*. This conceptual schema provides a culture-specific perspective on the raw experience, gives it coherence, and suggests ways of *coping* with it (to use another highly culture-specific English word).

Unlike many other writers on the subject of emotions, Nussbaum does appreciate the role of thoughts (conceptual schemas) in human emotional experience. In my view, she even goes too far in this direction, because throughout the book, she insists that emotions are judgments (rather than saying—as I would—that they include, or involve, judgments). I certainly agree with her, however, when she affirms that “it is of crucial importance to get clear about the precise content of the thought we ascribe to the person” (p. 41).

What is, then, the precise content of the thought that underlies the emotion that Nussbaum is most interested in, that is, “grief”? What does

she mean when she says that “all known societies have some variety of . . . grief” (p. 163) or that grief is “not in the least foreign to any society” (p. 170)?

To answer this question, we must consider Nussbaum’s account of what is essential to the emotion of “grief”—or, as she puts it, what are “the general identity conditions for grief” (p. 57). Here are her key generalizations:

What inspires grief is the death of someone beloved, someone who has been an important part of one’s own life. [p. 31]

The notion of loss . . . is essential to grief itself. [p. 31]

The grief itself must contain the thought of her [the beloved person’s] irrevocable deadness. [p. 44]

We have a type of pain that probably is necessary for grief: namely, the pain that an important part of one’s life is gone. [p. 64]

A specific episode of grief combines a background judgment of value with a noting of the way the world is with what one values. [p. 76]

In the actual event, my grief was . . . identical to a judgment with something like the following form: “My mother, an enormously valuable person and an important part of my life, is dead.” [p. 76]

The thought of grief included prominently . . . the thought of a gaping hole in my own life. [p. 82]

I have suffered a loss . . . it is a loss of self. [p. 83]

Nussbaum’s phenomenological account of “grief” reported above is very close to the semantic account of the meaning of the English word *grief* that I proposed in my 1999 book *Emotions across Languages and Cultures* (p. 68), reproduced below. The main difference between the two accounts lies in the metalanguage. Nussbaum uses as her metalanguage ordinary English in all its culture-specific richness. By contrast, the metalanguage used in my 1999 explication of *grief* and in the other simple semantic formulas in this article is the English version of the natural semantic metalanguage based on sixty or so empirically discovered universal human concepts, which are expressed as words or wordlike elements in all languages. These elements include GOOD and BAD, DO and HAPPEN, THINK, KNOW, WANT and FEEL, and a few dozen others, as shown in the table below. (See Wierzbicka 1996, Goddard 1998, Goddard and Wierzbicka eds. 2002).

Apart from the metalanguage used in the two accounts, the key difference is that I proposed mine as a semantic analysis of the (modern) English word *grief*, whereas Nussbaum proposes hers as a philosophical analysis of a universal human emotion.

*grief* (person X felt grief)

(a) X felt something because X thought something

(b) sometimes a person thinks like this:

- (c) "something very bad happened to me (a short time before now)
- (d) someone was like a part of me
- (e) something happened to this person (this person died)
- (f) because of this this person cannot be like a part of me any more
- (g) I want to think about this now
- (h) I can't think about other things now"
- (i) when this person thinks like this this person feels something very bad
- (j) X felt something like this
- (k) because X thought like this

As an account of the English and Anglo concept of "grief," Nussbaum's account is consistent with this explication and supports it from a personal, phenomenological point of view. As an account of a human universal, however, it is Anglocentric. The Anglocentric character of this account is highlighted, in particular, by phrases like "a specific episode of grief," and the insistence on the "pathological character" of prolonged grief "what distinguishes normal from pathological mourning is, above all, this change of tense: the pathological mourner continues to put the dead person at the very center of her own structure of goals and expectations, and this paralyzes life" (pp. 82–83).

**Table 1. Table of universal human concepts – English version**

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Substantives:	I, YOU, SOMEONE(PERSON), SOMETHING(THING), PEOPLE, BODY
Determiners:	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER
Quantifiers:	ONE, TWO, SOME, MANY/MUCH, ALL,
Attributes:	GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates:	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech:	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events, movements:	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
Existence, and possession:	THERE IS, HAVE
Life and death:	LIVE, DIE
Logical concepts:	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Time:	WHEN(TIME), NOW, AFTER, BEFORE, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME
Space:	WHERE(PLACE), HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCHING (CONTACT)
Intensifier, augmentor:	VERY, MORE

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Such an assessment of the emotions following a beloved person's death may be correct and valid within Anglo-American culture, but the claim to universality is surely unfounded. For example, in 19th-century Poland—partitioned among three foreign powers, deprived of national independence, and repeatedly rising in insurrection only to be crushed by the main occupying power, Tsarist Russia—there was a popular patriotic song “Czarna sukienka [A black dress].” The song celebrated the love and fidelity of women who, having lost their loved ones in an uprising, had sworn to wear a black dress of mourning to the end of their lives (cf. Davies 1981:271). During my early girlhood in the 1950s, my classmates and I still sang that song with voices slightly choking with emotion. Was this a pathological cultural tradition? There is a Polish word for “mourning,” but, as mentioned earlier, there is not one for “grief.” The words that the image of that black dress bring to mind include *ból* (pain), *cierpienie* (suffering), and *boleść* (sorrow or affliction)—with no implications of an episode of intense but short-term grief.

To say this is not to deny that in all societies, it often happens that when a person dies, some other people feel something very bad because of this for some time. One kind of evidence for this kind of hypothetical universal comes from crying: It has been observed that in most societies, when a person dies, some other people may cry. As I have discussed in my *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*, despite different cultural elaborations of crying, the primary and universal meaning of crying (that we find in children as well as in adults) can be summed up in the formula “something bad happened to me, because of this I feel something bad now.”

Another source of evidence for the hypothetical universal linking death with bad feelings is found, of course, in verbal testimonies of people from diverse societies, including testimonies obtained through ethnographic interviews. Here, however, it must be remembered that verbal testimonies are normally given in the local language and that they require an interpretation. If an anthropologist or a bilingual local person translates the most relevant local word or expression as either *sadness* or *grief* this does not mean that that is what the local word or expression really means. It is not unreasonable, however, to assume that a word or expression translated repeatedly by words like *sadness*, *grief*, *heartbreak*, *unhappiness*, and so forth, includes the semantic component “this person feels something bad.”

Even though in some societies, for example in Bali, crying and verbal expression of bad feelings may be discouraged by cultural norms (Wikan 1990), I am quite willing to accept (with Nussbaum) that in Bali, too, people often feel something very bad when someone that they have lived with dies. (I deliberately avoid here the English word *love* and use instead the

phrase *live with*, which is known to have its exact equivalents in all languages). But even when we accept that this link between someone dying and someone else feeling something very bad is universal, it does not follow from this that there is a distinct, identifiable type of emotion (namely, “grief”) that people everywhere in the world tend to feel in such situations. Arguably, the link that we do find universally is that between thinking “something very bad happened (is happening) to me” and “feeling something (very bad) because of this”; but to say this is not the same as to say that “grief” is a universal human emotion.

According to Paul Ekman (cf., e.g., 1992), “sadness” is a universal human emotion, and according to Nussbaum, “grief” is. In my view, both these claims reflect ways of looking at human experience through the prism of the English language. What we can say from a language-independent perspective is, rather, that everywhere in the world, people think (sometimes), “something very bad happened to me”; that everywhere in the world, people feel (sometimes) something very bad; that, everywhere in the world, people die and everywhere in the world people cry; and, also, that everywhere in the world it happens that when someone dies some other people feel something (very) bad because of this.

There are of course many kinds of bad feelings. Although different languages and cultures categorize these feelings in different ways, it is plausible to think that there are some commonalities in these categorizations. In particular, it is plausible to suggest that these commonalities may be linked with the following four cognitive scenarios:

- (a) Something bad can happen to me  
I don't want it to happen
- (b) Something bad happened/is happening to me  
I don't want things like this to happen/ this to be happening
- (c) Someone did something bad  
I don't want this someone to do things like this  
I want to do something because of this
- (d) People can think something bad about me  
I don't want this

For a speaker of English, these four scenarios may bring to mind the English words (i) *fear*, (ii) *grief/sadness/distress*, (iii) *anger*, and (iv) *shame*, but the concepts encoded in these words are far too specific to capture the commonalities of people's emotional experience across languages and cultures.

When I say that it is plausible that the four scenarios outlined above capture some commonalities in the human emotional experience, I am not relying on speculation but, rather, on the evidence from numerous languages and cultures that have been studied by linguists and anthropologists (cf. Harkins and Wierzbicka 2001; Wierzbicka 1992a, 1999, in press). Words comparable with *fear*, *anger*, and *shame* do not match across

language boundaries but they often do have lexical counterparts with somewhat similar meanings—words that often share two or three semantic components rather than one (“I feel something bad” or “this person feels something bad”).

Interestingly, words like *sadness* and *grief* are far less comparable across language boundaries than words like *fear*, *anger*, and *shame*. This linguistic fact suggests that the conceptualization of emotional experience linked with thoughts like “something bad happened” or “something bad happened to me” is more variable than that of emotional experience linked with thoughts like “something bad can happen to me,” “someone did something bad,” and “people can think something bad about me.”

The only commonality that we do find in the conceptualization of “bad things happening to me” is expressed, cross-culturally, through crying; and the universal message of crying is neither one of “sadness” nor one of “grief,” but rather, one of something closer to “pain.” More precisely, this message can be expressed as follows:

something bad is happening to me (now)  
I don't want this to be happening  
I feel something bad (now)

On the basis of the universal phenomenon of crying, I would suggest that this mode of thinking, too, is commonly seen as linked with a distinct category of emotional experience. Thus, when we see a person from a distant culture crying at someone else's deathbed, **it is more justified to say that this person feels something like pain** than to assume, with Nussbaum, that he or she feels “grief” (or, as Ekman and many others would say, “sadness”).

Next to universal bodily signs, such as crying, raising or lowering the corners of one's mouth, raising or lowering one's eyebrows, and so on, language is the best guide to how people think about their feelings. The fact that the modern English language has the word *grief*, referring to a temporary disruption of normal life linked (primarily) with somebody else's death, tells us how people in Anglo societies tend to think about the experience of a person who is crying at the scene of someone else's death.

Because, as Nussbaum acknowledges, the way people think about their experience influences the way they feel, the presence in modern English of the word *grief* (with its current meaning) may well influence the way speakers of English feel when confronted with a loved person's death. The experience of a Russian person, who thinks about a loved person's death in terms of more general categories such as “gore” or “nesčastie,” may be influenced by the ways of thinking reflected, and encoded, in these words. Of course there are also individual differences between people, but these do not cancel those due to the languages as such.

In Part IV of Tolstoy's (1932) *War and Peace*, in the space of eight pages, there are two deaths (Prince Andrew's and Petya Rostov's) and, from an Anglo point of view, several "griefs" (Natasha's and Princess Mary's over Prince Andrew, and Natasha's and her mother's over the boy Petya). From a Russian point of view, however, what the bereaved persons feel is not "grief" but various other emotions. These are described by Tolstoy by means of the metaphor of *rana* (wound) and *duševnaya rana* (soul-wound), which recur several times, and also in terms of recurring Russian emotion terms (and expressions): *užas* (terror/horror), *gore* (affliction), *strašnaja bol'* (terrible pain), *otčajanie* (despair), and *pečal'* (sorrow). There is also a reference to *nesčast'e* (terrible misfortune, a source of great unhappiness). Furthermore, there are similes: *čto-to strašno bol'no udarilo ee v serdce* (something hit her, terribly painfully, in the heart), and *ej pokazalos' čto čto-to otryvaetsja v nej i čto ona umiraet* (it seemed to her that something was tearing off inside her and that she was dying). In addition, there are also references to *rydat'* (not "crying" but "violent crying") and *bit'sja golovoj o stenku* (to bash one's head, repeatedly, against the wall).

All these linguistic resources convey a whole gamut of intense emotions, none of which is associated specifically with somebody's death. In my view, to say that what Tolstoy's characters are experiencing is, unbeknownst to Tolstoy and themselves, "grief," and that the absence in Russian of a word for "grief" does not mean the absence of grief, would be to misrepresent these characters' experience. Moreover, it would not help much to qualify the "grief" of Tolstoy's characters as "Russian grief" (cf. Nussbaum's reference to "Balinese grief" [p. 161]). To view Balinese and Russian emotions as "Balinese grief" and "Russian grief" is again to view them through the prism of the English language and of Anglo culture.

Because English-emotion terms like *grief* or *anger* stand for culture-specific bundles of semantic components they are not suitable as analytical tools for exploring emotions cross-culturally. Nor are they fine-grained enough to explore the complexities of human emotions from a psychological or ethical point of view. Attempts to do so often lead to confusion rather than clarification. (Nussbaum's comment on the apparent contradiction between Jesus' anger in the temple, when he drove away the money changers, and his exhortations against anger is a good case in point. For detailed discussion of this question, see chapter 3 in my 2001 book *What Did Jesus Mean?*)

When the news of young Petya's death reaches the Rostov household, the maid reports it to Natasha, with a sob, as "*nesčastie*" (malheur). To translate this utterance into English as "a misfortune" (as Louise and Aylmer Maude's translation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* [1932], vol. 3, p. 351 did) is to belittle the interpretation put in the original on the event of

death; and to translate it as “a tragedy” would be to interpret it as something absolutely extraordinary. By contrast, *nesčastie*—a terrible misfortune—implies something more terrible than “misfortune” but not exceptional and extraordinary like “tragedy.” The implication is that *nesčastie* is part of the normal fabric of human existence.

In contrast to the English *grief*, the Russian *gore*, used repeatedly in relation to both Prince Andrew’s and Petya’s death, does not imply a special and exceptional emotion related primarily to death. It has no special conceptual link with death, and it implies, rather, great suffering “of the kind that is a normal part of human life.” The translator may feel forced to translate *gore* as *grief*—again, as the Maudes (1932, vol. 3, pp. 348, 352, 353) did—because there is no English word closer to *gore*; but when it is so translated, the perspective on the event changes. The word *grief* brackets, as it were, death, and the suffering it brings to others, against the background of the “normal life.” This ethnophilosophy of “grief” as an exceptional disruption of normal life is not only reflected in the modern meaning of the word *grief* but also passed on with it to the new generations in the process of the acquisition of English.

We cannot prove that what Russians feel is not “grief” and we cannot know for sure what Russians do feel (as the Russian proverb says, *čužaja duša potemki*, [another person’s soul/heart is {hidden in} darkness]). But if we want to learn what *can* be learned about Russian emotional experience we have to listen to Russians themselves (e.g., by paying special attention to the best Russian writers); and we have to listen to the Russian language, which is a repository of, and a guide to, that experience. It is also a living source of cultural scripts, including emotional scripts, for the speakers of Russian—just as English is not only a repository of, and guide to, shared Anglo experience, but also a living source of cultural scripts, including emotional scripts, for the speakers of English (cf. Wierzbicka 2003).

What applies to Tolstoy applies also to Proust. Although Nussbaum’s view and indeed experience of grief has been shaped by a long-time intimacy with Proust, in fact Proust saw Marcel’s emotions after the disappearance and then death of his beloved Albertine in terms of *malheur* (great misfortune), *souffrance* (suffering), *douleur* (pain, distress), and *chagrin* (acute sorrow), that is, terms without any conceptual links with death, or personal loss. To say that Marcel experienced “grief” would be to impose on his emotions an Anglo cultural perspective. The French words *malheur*, *souffrance*, *douleur*, and *chagrin* give us a better guide to the experience of Marcel and other people living their emotional lives through French, than the English word *grief*.

Just as the Russian words like *gore* and *nesčastie* and the French words like *chagrin* and *malheur* provide a guide to Russian and French



experience and cultural scripts, so too the Chinese word *ai* provides a guide to Chinese experience and also a source of cultural scripts for the speakers of Chinese. Chinese, too, has a word linking emotion with death, but this word is different in meaning from the English *grief* and points to a different geography of emotions.

As noted by Zhengdao Ye, *ai* is variously translated into English as *grief*, *sadness*, or *sorrow*, but different in meaning from all these words.

The close link between *ai* and *death* seems to suggest *grief*, which is prototypically connected with death. However, phrases like *ai si* (lit. “*ai* thoughts,” “sad memories of the deceased”) and *ai ge* (lit. “*ai* song,” “an elegy”) strongly suggest that thoughts of *ai* are focused not on *the loss event*, but on the other person. Thus, *ai* is very different from *grief*. Long, deep and sympathetic thoughts are key elements in the meaning of *ai*. [2001]

Using the NSM framework, Ye (2001) has explicated *ai* as follows:

*ai* (person X felt ai)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks about another person like this:
- (c) this person died
- (d) this is very bad for this person
- (e) I don't want things like this to happen to this person
- (f) I want to do something good for this person because of this
- (g) I want to think about this person for a long time”
- (h) when this person thinks like this this person feels something very bad for a long time
- (i) X felt something like this
- (j) because X thought something like this
- (k) when something very bad happens to another person
- (l) a person can feel something like this
- (m) because this person can think something like this

Commenting on this explication, Ye explains:

Components (d) (“this is very bad for this person”) and (e) (“I don't want things like this to happen to this person”) reflect the other-oriented characteristics of *ai* in which the focus is on the misfortune of another person. It is not counted as a loss to oneself. The personal character of TO ME is part of the meaning of *grief* (cf. Wierzbicka 1999:68), but is absent from *ai*. [Ye 2001:373–374]

Let us consider briefly ways of speaking about emotion and death in one other language, Pintupi, spoken in Central Australia. According to the anthropologist Fred Myers, here, the main word used in relation to emotion and death is *yalurru*, which he glosses variously as *grief*, *sorrow*, or *compassionate empathy*:

Both “compassion” (*ngaltu*) and “grief” or “sorrow” (*yalurru*) refer to a judgment of sorrow or concern for another, a kind of compassionate empathy, although “grief” represents the more extreme emotionality. [1986]

One clear difference between *yalurru* and the English *grief* is the time frame: Whereas “grief” is expected to be intense but short-term,

*yalurrpa* is expected to be long-term. According to Myers, self-inflicted injuries (sorry cuts) connected with *yalurrpa* are meaningful not only as an expression of current bad feelings, but also as a source of permanent scars. Myers (1986) goes so far as to refer to a certain “accretion of ‘sorrow’” (117) in time, “the value of the sacred owes much to the accretion of ‘sorrow’ for the dead,” (117) the sacred objects are “charged with reminders of the dead” (118).

In Pintupi theory, “grief” or “sorrow” (*yalurrpa*) is equally rooted in social relations, generated by loss or threat of loss of some related other and represented as a loss of part of oneself. Such “grief” is expressed by wailing at the news of a death as well as through a set of expected self-inflicted injuries, such as gashing the head or stabbing the thigh. These injuries and the marks they leave, appropriate to the kinship relationship one has to the dead, represent the inscribing of the body social onto the individual. People like to recount the origin of each mark . . . As seen by the Pintupi, sorrow is a particularly important human trait, attaching to many situations surrounding death and loss. For years after a death, one should not mention the names of the deceased because relatives will be too “sorry” . . . . Because people are “too sorry,” one avoids the place where kin have died until the memory has faded in intensity. . . . Abandonment of a place in which death occurs is thus a cultural convention . . . the value of the sacred owes much to the accretion of “sorrow” for the dead. On sight of ritual paraphernalia and the sacred places of The Dreaming, older men often begin to wail because they are “sorry.” One man explained this with reference to the designs incised on his spear-thrower, “Dead men schooled me, gave this to me. When people see it, they get sorry. Give one like this to a man, and people will see it and give you a woman. Too much crying [from sorrow] for this one.” Ritual and sacred things are associated with the memory of people who previously handled them and passed them on. This heritage provides the source, in part, of their emotional value. Charged with reminders of the dead, they may make one cry with “sorrow,” remembering that which binds them to this object. [Myers 1986:117–118]

As I have discussed in detail in my *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals* (1999), **emotional universals do exist, but they cannot be identified through English words like *grief*, which embody culture-specific Anglo concepts.** And to restate the basic contention of this article, although the role of language in people’s emotional life may indeed have sometimes been overestimated, far more often it has been seriously *underestimated*. The role of language (usu. English) in the scholarly interpretation of human emotional experience has often been not only underestimated but denied, with English words like *sadness* and *anger* being persistently used to identify “universal human emotions.”

Martha Nussbaum acknowledges the links between emotion and culture, and also, to some extent, the links between emotion and language. In my view, however, she, too, underestimates the role of language in people’s emotional experience and its interpretation. This underestimation includes both a lack of sufficient attention to the emotional vocabulary of languages other than English as a guide to emotional experience and a concomitant lack of attention to the dangers of using English words like

*grief* for making generalizations about universal human emotions and human lives.

Even when Nussbaum concedes that the “namelessness” of some emotions in this or that language “probably has some significance” (p. 155) she appears to imply that the emotions named in English (or in Latin) exist—but happen to be nameless in those other languages. If we think of human emotional experience in terms of countless possible conceptual scenarios the notion of “namelessness” must lose its common-sense appeal.

Presumably, in all societies it often happens that people (esp., the parents) experience very good feelings at the birth of a child. The phenomenon of such rejoicing is as likely to be a human universal as is “grief” over a family member’s death. Yet of the two only the second is categorized in the English lexicon as a distinct, death-related, kind of emotion (there is no special word in English for birth-related good feelings)—and only the second (“grief”) gets onto Nussbaum’s list of universal human emotions.

This is, I would suggest, another case of a philosopher’s native language influencing their views on human nature and human emotions. Such influences are understandable and natural; but they need to be corrected by studying the vocabulary and discourse of emotions cross-linguistically.

To take a less hypothetical example, in Yiddish, there is a word referring to the special kind of joy that people derive from their children: *naches*. The experience of rejoicing in one’s children is, presumably, no less universal than that of grieving over the death of a family member. Yet again, *naches* does not make it onto Nussbaum’s list of universal human emotions whereas *grief* does. My point is not that “*naches*” is as universal as “*grief*,” but rather, that “*grief*” is as culture-bound as “*naches*.” Because the presence of a label imposes a certain interpretation on the human situation to which it refers, it also implies a certain cultural script—for example, that it is normal, natural, and desirable for a person to rejoice in his or her children; and this cultural norm is likely to reinforce, and to shape, the emotional response to that situation. In a sense, the existence of a term like *naches* provides evidence for a distinct conceptualization and a distinct type of emotional experience; if the speakers of Yiddish perceive their very good feelings derived from having children as a special, distinct kind of feeling, how could a cultural outsider tell them that they are mistaken, and that in fact they are experiencing “joy” or “happiness,” that is, “the same” emotion that they experience in many other joyful and happy situations?

Nussbaum says that for her, the thought “my wonderful mother is dead” was part of her very experience of grief (cf. pp. 45, 65). Presumably, for a person living his or her inner life through Yiddish, the thought “I have wonderful children” can, similarly, be part of their very experience of

*naches*. Thus, although both *grief* and *naches* are related to certain universal aspects of human existence and experience, neither of them can legitimately be called a universal human emotion. There are commonalities between *naches* and *joy*, as there are between the English *grief* and the Russian *gore*, but there are also differences; and the linguistic differences contribute to, as well as provide evidence for, differences in the experience itself.

It is hardly an accident that it is Yiddish, in contrast to many other languages, which has developed a special concept of “*naches*”: it is clearly a concept that reflects as well as passes on some cultural values of Yiddish and Jewish culture. Similarly, it is hardly an accident that it is modern English, in contrast to many other languages, which has developed a special concept of “*grief*”—a temporary and in some ways exceptional emotion, linked with somebody’s death and seen as an exceptional interruption of normal life. The recent phenomenon of grief counseling appears to be related to the perception that “*grief*” is something exceptional, and also, something that can and should be managed through psychological means. It would be difficult to imagine counseling for *malheur*, *nescastie*, *gore*, *sorrow*, or *woes*—which appear to be part of life, rather than a death-related interruption of life, and that could not be counseled away.

Nussbaum’s underestimation of the role of language is visible, *inter alia*, in her assessment of Paul Ekman’s theory of human emotions. Referring to Paul Griffiths’s (1997) critique of Ekman’s work, she writes:

Ekman’s research claims something far out of line with the data when he claims to show that *emotions* are universally experienced. For the research deals exclusively with the behavioural manifestation of (some) emotions . . . It does not deal with all emotions’ content, or with the ways people interpret situations as calling for a particular emotion. It thus has nothing to say about universality in occasions for anger, or grief, or fear. Those are matters of interpretation and belief, and the studies confine themselves to behavior and recognition of behavior. [p. 159]

These criticisms of Ekman are valid, but in my view they do not go far enough. As I have argued in *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures*, the so-called “basic human emotions” (Wierzbicka, 1999), which Ekman and his associates believe can be read in human faces, are also a matter of interpretation and belief. Yet Nussbaum appears to accept Ekman’s claim that these so-called “basic emotions” (identified through the English taxonomy of emotions) represent genuine human universals. For example, she writes:

Paul Ekman’s research on facial expression, following Darwin, suggests that certain facial expressions are cross-culturally recognized as signs of anger, fear, disgust, surprise, joy, or sadness. Less conclusively, he also shows a cross-cultural tendency to display such expressions, in the appropriate circumstances. [p. 158]

Thus, although the claim about display is seen as “less conclusive,” the claim about cross-cultural recognition of “anger,” “sadness,” and so

forth, is apparently seen as conclusive (later on, Nussbaum admits that she is less than fully convinced of the recognizability of those “basic emotions” but she is willing to “bypass these worries” [p. 158]). But to accept Ekman’s claims about the universality of “anger,” “sadness,” and so forth, means to bypass the central issue of the relation between emotions and languages. If, for example, Tahitian has no word corresponding to *sadness* (Levy 1973) and if, as Nussbaum says, “namelessness is probably significant” (155) how can we accept that the interpretation of experience encoded in the English word *sadness* is a valid way of representing a universal human emotion?

Nussbaum states that “theorists of emotion frequently fall into one or the other of two extreme camps” (p. 143) on the issue of the social variability of emotions. At one extreme, “some theorists completely ignore the role of society, and treat emotional life as universal in all salient respects. . . . At the other extreme, anthropologists sometimes speak as if the emotional repertory of a society were socially constructed through and through” (143). I agree that both these extremes are mistaken and that we need a balanced account that allows for both diversity and universals. I do not think, however, that such a balanced account can include Ekman’s “basic emotions”—identified through the prism of the English language (cf. Wierzbicka 1992b). “Sadness” is no more universal than “grief.” What is universal are cognitive scenarios like the following: “something (very) bad is happening to me, I don’t want this to be happening, I feel something (very) bad because of this.”

Finally, looking at Nussbaum’s theory of emotions more broadly, one cannot help noticing her emphasis on human “goals,” “plans” and “projects” as a basis of human emotional experience. For example, she writes, “Emotions . . . view the world from the point of view of my own scheme of goals and projects” (p. 49). All emotions? Nussbaum raises this question herself, “Are all emotions eudaimonistic? Do all, that is, make reference to my important goals and projects?” (p. 53). Despite her own apparent doubt, she concludes that even emotions, which she calls “non-eudaimonistic,” such as “wonder,” can be explained in terms “of a person’s scheme of ends” (p. 55). She emphatically endorses the psychologist Richard Lazarus’s tenet that “A taxonomy of emotions is . . . a taxonomy of a creature’s goals,” (1991:391) and she emphasizes the parallelism between Lazarus’s view of emotions and her own: “Lazarus’ theory is thus in all essentials the view of emotions I have defended in Chapter 1. Like that theory, it stresses that emotions are usually eudaimonistic, concerned with one or more of the creature’s most important goals or projects” (p. 109).

As I have argued elsewhere (Wierzbicka 1999), the main themes of human emotions—as evidenced, inter alia, in the languages of the world—include not only thinking “I want to do something, I can do it” (i.e. goals),

but also thinking “I want (or I don’t want) something to happen to me.” Arguably, the theme of “not wanting something to happen” is the most salient one of all.

In successful, opulent, dynamic societies focused on progress, success, and achievements, life may indeed be seen largely in terms of goals and projects, and people’s emotional life (and discourse) may reflect this. In most other societies, however, dangers, disasters, and the general vulnerability of the human condition appear to be much more in focus, and the thought “I don’t want bad things to happen to me (to us)” appears to be at least as salient in people’s emotional life as energetic and optimistic thoughts like “I want to do something,” “I think I can do it.” In all probability, more so.

English words like *satisfaction*, *frustration*, *setback*, and *failure* do indeed refer to a person’s goals, but words like *fear*, *pain*, and *sorrow* do not; and neither do Russian words like *nesčastie*, *gore*, and *pečal’*.

There is of course a link between the notion of “goal” and that of “wanting,” but the two need to be distinguished. For example, *hope* implies that one wants something good to happen, but it does not imply that one necessarily wants to do something because of that. *Anxiety* implies that one wants something bad not to happen, but again, it does not imply a goal. *Fear* may lead a person to run, that is, to do something to avoid a bad event (a goal), but it may not. On the other hand, words like *ambition*, *success* and *achievement* do imply goals—but these are not emotion terms. Thus, even in English, the vocabulary of emotion is not centered around goals, although it is significant that it includes a word for a bad feeling caused by failure to achieve goals (*frustration*).

Nussbaum herself talks of the Anglo-American ethos of optimism, individualism, search for happiness, and so forth (p. 169). It would appear that this ethos has colored her own theory of human emotions. Judging by the vocabulary and discourse of emotion, from a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspective, “happening” is no less important to people’s emotional life than “doing,” and suffering, no less central than goals, plans and projects.

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