

**Hili Razinsky, *Ambivalence: A Philosophical Exploration*,  
Rowman & Littlefield International, London New York  
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When a friend tells me that she loves and at the same time does not love her husband, I tend not to interpret her literally. I will treat my friend's emotional states seriously but not her wording. A literal interpretation regards the friend as having two opposing attitudes regarding the same object. But it is impossible to love and not love the same person at the same time, this is a contradiction. Applying the charity principle I will interpret my friend's words less literally. Maybe she is expressing the disappointment that after entering the routine of marriage she does not experience the excitement and enthusiasm of love. Maybe she wants to say that she loves some features of her husband's character but dislikes others. Or maybe she is sometimes so angry with her husband that she cannot feel the love that she knows she has. My friend's sentence is consistent with each of these interpretations and that is why I prefer them to the literal interpretation. My interpretive strategy assumes that strict ambivalence – in which two opposing attitudes constitute together a unified attitude – must be impossible.

At least, this was my interpretive strategy until reading chapter 3 of Hili Razinsky's book on ambivalence. In this chapter Razinsky starts with the complex view of emotion, according to which an emotion is a complex of mental and behavioural elements drawn from several categories. Razinsky argues convincingly that emotions are among the elements included in the complex and that the relation between the elements is not always harmonious. Conflict between different elements is part of what integrates them to create a unity that stands in relation to other parts of the subject's mind. This sophisticated addition to the complex view of emotion creates the conceptual place for ambivalent emotions. My friend's attitude to her husband is a single "tension-fraught attitude" where each of the poles refers to the other pole as opposing to it. I am convinced by this chapter that my friend's statement that she loves and does not love her husband can (in some cases) be taken literally. In such cases my friend's statement is not less coherent and rational than the statement that she loves her husband or the statement that she does not. This chapter is however only one example of a multi-faceted investigation of ambivalence.

Chapter 8 takes an even more radical stand. It investigates statements such as: "Hannah ought to apologize and she also ought not to apologize". A statement that says that Hannah ought to apologize aims at objectivity; it aims to convey what Hannah really ought to do. But the ambivalent statement does not seem to convey what Hannah really ought to do. The temptation to interpret the "inconsistent" statement non-literally is even stronger than in the example discussed above. Maybe

Hannah has a reason to apologize and a reason not to apologize and she is still deliberating as to which reason is stronger. Or maybe it is a case where the reasons are on a par. According to such interpretations objective ambivalence is only a phase or aspect of deliberation. Often the deliberator starts with opposing value judgments and deliberates with the aim of reaching a non-ambivalent judgment. However, Razinsky shows that such interpretations do not exhaust the relationship between ambivalence and deliberation. The chapter offers an elaborate account of the role of ambivalence in deliberation and one of its interesting results is that an ambivalent judgment is not always a passing stage in deliberation; it can be the conclusion of the deliberation.

The natural objection to this possibility is that Hannah deliberates in order to know whether to apologize or not. How can the ambivalent judgment that she ought to apologize and she ought not to apologize guide her in what to do? Razinsky responds to this objection by showing that ambivalent judgments about what one ought to do do not necessarily inhibit action. The thought that ambivalent judgements inhibit action rests on a simplistic view about the way deliberation guides action. It is not true that a full specification of the action is given prior to the deliberation, the deliberation shapes the options. For example Hannah might decide to apologize in a way that respects also her judgment that she ought not to apologize. This is just one example of the novel and interesting insights that this chapter provides.

The author of this book takes the notion of ambivalence very seriously. Acknowledging that strict ambivalence is possible and even common undermines very entrenched philosophical views of personhood, action, emotion, belief, value and rationality. Showing us the path toward novel accounts of these important concepts, Razinsky also challenges the view that ambivalence implies a miserable and impoverished life. The book constitutes an analysis of a variety of ambivalent structures and forms, from self-overcoming (see the introduction section on Shahrazad's wise and courageous feat in *One Thousand and One Nights*) to self-deception (Ch. 7). Chapter 6 criticizes the view that although ambivalence is possible, it is merely the departure point, residue, or failure in the pursuit of harmony. Rejecting Neo Aristotelian attempts to "contain" ambivalence within a life guided by a norm of harmonization, Razinsky discovers in Freud a more viable view of the relations of ambivalence and the pursuit of harmony, according to which, ambivalence is pervasive, and a concern with harmony can be combined with it in various ways. While ambivalence excludes contented repose, it is not a barrier to significant and creative behaviour and action (Ch. 6 and 8). The merit of this book lies in showing that ambivalence is often central to our capacity to act, care, and respond to reality. This implies that flourishing is often a matter of how a person shapes her ambivalence, rather than of whether she succeeds in avoiding ambivalence. Razinsky's book is full of real life examples which make the arguments clearer and more convincing. The book is well written, interesting, surprising, and original.

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