Emotions and Social Movements
Paris, 13 november 2008.

What I'd like to do today is, not so much to make an argument,
as to tell a story about my search for theories about emotions
that I could use to understand social movements.

As you know, emotions were a kind of gestalt test
for generations of movement scholars:
to the collective behavior generation they were proof
that protestors were irrational,
as emotions were always described as "strong" emotions,
never mild ones.
For the structural paradigm that followed, beginning in the 60s,
emotions STILL would have proven protestors to be irrational,
so they had to be denied, ignored, or repressed.

So when I came to write the Art of Moral Protest in the mid-90s,
I found NO systematic body of literature that helped me understand emotions.
Even the emerging cultural paradigm, of which I was part,
had little use for emotions.
For example frame alignment scholars talked about motivational framing,
but left it as a cognitive statement,
not a set of emotional processes.
Apparently it was hard enough to show that idea and frames
are socially constructed, without seeming to some to slip into irrationalism.

So I pulled a few pieces from the literature on the cultural construction of emotions,
and otherwise was pretty INDUCTIVE, using work on solidarities, rituals,
and my own simple observations.
At the same time, Jeff Goodwin turned to Freud, via Philip Slater,
to talk about affective ties and the tension between dyads and larger collectives,
or the challenges of compound players, as I would now call them.
None of this was very systematic.

At exactly the same time, leading to publications in 1996 and 1997,
Verta Taylor and Julian Groves were drawing on feminism
to talk about emotion work, and how gendered it is.
I was in touch with Julian as he was doing this work, but not with Verta.
At the same time, in 1996, Sherryl Kleinman published a book
on how men and women get different kinds of emotional credit
for the same emotional displays.

Feminism criticized the existing emotional division of labor,
and was able to point to various forms of resistance to it,
especially as the women's movement had to confront
feeling rules that prevented women from expressing powerful emotions,
prevented women from externalizing their emotions,
and encouraged them instead to internalize negative emotions.

But in my opinion this feminist work was not very crisp theoretically,
although it certainly fit with a broader cultural constructionism.

But what we managed to do, I think, was to establish
that emotions were a central part of all political action,
that emotions did not entail irrationality, or even necessarily error,
and that existing models of mobilization were in fact misspecified
because emotions did a lot of the work implied by some major concepts.

In a short amount of time, we carved out a place for emotions
in the study of social movements.
Helena Flam in Germany was doing something parallel.

It turned out, though, that these three streams of thought,
psychoanalysis, feminism, and cultural constructionism,
were not really recognized traditions, or at least not mainstream traditions,
among the social psychologists
who in American sociology made up the field of the sociology of emotions.

Each approach was good at certain things but bad at lots more.

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So for the last decade, even though I've been working on other projects,
not related to emotions and social movements,
I've had the opportunity to carry on a conversation,
perhaps even an investigation,
into these mainstream social-psychological ways to think about emotions.
I've been able to think about how to apply them to mobilization.

So what I'd like to do is to comment on these American traditions,
and then to come back to social movements
to make some suggestions about where I think we are today
in exploring emotions and mobilization,

and especially to link emotions briefly to strategy.

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Perhaps the most famous American tradition derives from
Arlie Hochschild's research on the display of emotions as paid work.
In her classic book The Managed Heart, Hochschild used concepts
such as emotional labor, feeling rules, and deep vs surface acting,
to show especially how workers are paid to arouse emotions in others,
especially in customers, in her case looking at the work of flight attendants.

Hochschild partly drew on feminism, in that emotional work
was typically still women's work, even when it was paid work.
And in fact Hochschild's earliest research on emotions was,
much like Verta Taylor's, about the management of anger in the women's movement.

But this research was, I think, overly normativized,
in that the feeling rules were thought to be widely shared.
What might have been an opening to social movements,
namely the rhetorical impact of emotional display,
especially for the purpose of having a variety of effects on audiences,
was not the main thrust of this tradition.

Students of Hochschild's have applied her ideas to other settings.
For instance Jennifer Pierce has studied lawyers,
showing that litigators, people who argue cases in the courtroom,
often develop a nasty, aggressive display that intimidates others,
showing that norms are often broken, or at least are context-specific.

On the other hand, Hochschild's formulation
was also inspired by a Marxism of the workplace,
which introduced the idea that the norms were being broken
as a form of exploitation of labor,
that there were objective costs to the emotions
that these workers were being forced to display,
because these were at odds with their "real" feelings.

So something interesting emerged in the ten years
between Hochschild's research and book,
and Robin Leidner's book on fast food workers, which appeared in 1993.
Whereas Hochschild's root imagery was Marxist,
so that emotional labor was a form of exploitation,

a form of alienation from one's self in addition to alienation from one's product,
ten years later emotion work came to be seen as a tool
that workers could use for their OWN benefit,
not just for the benefit of their employers.
So employees saw emotion work as a way
to distance themselves from unpleasant customers;
and there was more emphasis on interactions with co-workers
as a way of resisting exploitation.

Part of this is no doubt a shift in the zeitgeist,
in which culture came to be seen as a set of tools
which people could use for a variety of purposes,
rather than a blanket of norms that had to be followed,
or understandings that were shared within "a culture."

Another shift was from emphasizing the dominance of capital,
and more toward recognizing resistance to it.

I'm tempted to label Hochschild's approach
a symbolic interactionist theory of emotions,
but that is both too much and too little.
Her economic model falls short, I think, of a full interactionist theory,
which would include more interactions than employer-employee
and employee-customer.
On the other hand, almost every sociological approach to emotions
is interactionist to some degree, as we'll see,
so that includes Hochschild, but doesn't really EXCLUDE anyone.

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A second major tradition, more general and more structural,
is Theodore Kemper's status and power model.

Kemper first related different levels of power and status
to what he calls structural emotions:
when we feel we have adequate power relative to others, we feel safe;
when we have inadequate power, we feel anxiety or fear;
when we have too much power we feel guilty.
And with status, we feel parallel ways:
contented if we have adequate status,
sad or angry if we have too little;
and ashamed if we have too much.

He then goes through emotions that result from interactions,
trying to show that they differ according to
whether we are dealing with someone with more power or status,
less of them, or the same amount.
It's a neat and comprehensive system, and extremely sociological,
depending as it does on a theory of social structure.

Because, unlike Hochschild, Kemper is a hedgehog,
and this is his one big idea, he promotes it at every opportunity,
and was eager to show that his model applies to social movements.

But I think the model has two failings for our purposes.
First, power is reduced to coercion.
In my own vocabulary, I would say that strategic moves,
ways of getting what you want, come in three families:
coercion, which has a physical element,
payment, which does not require agreement just cooperation,
and persuasion, in which you change others' minds.

By stressing coercion, Kemper ignores the bulk
of the tactics social movements adopt,
especially since movements are specialists at persuasion.

Kemper tries to capture voluntary compliance in his idea of status,
but this is a pre-existing form of credibility a player has,
which may make her persuasion more effective
but is not the same as that persuasion.
And status often makes persuasion unnecessary
by providing positions of control over payments and coercion.

The other failing, then, is that Kemper assumes
that interactions occur in hierarchical settings,
in which someone has more power and/or status, and someone has less.
Organized groups, interacting with one another in civil society,
are different from individuals interacting
with superiors and inferiors in recognized hierarchies.
The play of allies, opponents, targets, media, and so on,
can take many forms.
Even interactions with the state, with authorities,
are not necessarily cases of low-status suppliants to high-status officials.
For my taste, this approach is simply too structural,

and perhaps not sufficiently strategic and rhetorical.

But Kemper's emphasis on underlying social structure
and Hochschild's on display, make them nicely complementary.

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Another large tradition relevant to emotions is affect control theory,
probably more active than the Hochschild or the Kemper tradition.
Developed especially by David Heise, ACT has 2 basic parts:
there is a cultural background of roles and identities,
and then there are events, interactions, that tap into these background meanings.

The background meanings are defined along 3 dimensions:
Good or bad, known as evaluation,
Strong or weak, known as potency,
And active or passive, known as activity.
There is a continuum for each of these.

So the role of a "protestor" is usually seen as extremely active,
somewhat good, and rather weak.
If I recall correctly, it is near roles such as boy,
and I think student.

To me, these survey findings about cultural stereotypes
are the most interesting part of ACT.
It really gets at culture, as well as showing that
cognition and emotion are inextricably combined in cultural meanings.
And it seems to me that a lot of political rhetoric
is aimed at changing these stereotypes for particular groups,
moving a group from one role to another.
This is classic epidictic rhetoric, familiar to the ancient Greeks.

Thus a protest group wants to present itself as good, of course,
but it must be careful in its power definition.
It wants to be seen as powerful enough to have an impact,
but not so powerful that it does not need support from others.
This is a balancing act or tradeoff between victim and hero.

And on the activity dimension,
it's probably more sympathetic to present yourself as initially passive,
and then reacting to some outrage imposed on you,

than as initially active, which can be interpreted
as looking around for causes, perhaps for reasons of personality.
[In my work on strategy, I argue that
people tend to be suspicious of those who initiate strategic engagements.]

I'll come back to this idea of character types – villains, victims, heroes—
But let me just point out that ACT is especially good at defining them.

But then there are also events which occur in the foreground,
when our cultural roles and images are either confirmed,
or more interestingly, not confirmed.
These generate emotions, or transient impressions, as ACT labels them,
and we work hard to reconcile these with our lasting understandings.

Thus if we see a protestor strike a police officer,
even though we generally think of protestors as good,
we may be shocked or angry, and we have to do some interpretive work:
we may decide that the police officer provoked the attack unfairly,
or we may conclude that the protestor is not really a protestor,
but perhaps a agent provocateur planted in the crowd to cause trouble.
If we see a lot of aggressive protestors we might change our basic orientation:
we might decide that protestors are not so kindly after all,
or we might develop a distinction between two different kinds of protestors.
And so on.

ACT makes predictions about what people expect
from encounters between two different roles,
say between student and teacher, protestor and police,
again an interesting picture of culture at work.

So ACT can help us understand a number of things,
including moral shocks that require us to do some cognitive and emotional work
to keep the world appearing as our affects tell us it should.
It can also tell us what is likely to generate a moral shock.

It can also tell us something about character formation, as I mentioned,
And about what tropes we use in our rhetoric.

Its weakness, on the other hand,
is that it tends to assume a lot of agreement within a culture,
over the roles and identities that get referenced.

And it doesn't explicitly address the conscious display of emotions,
although it doesn't preclude that possibility either.

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I'll mention a fourth body of work,
that of Randall Collins on rituals and emotions.
Collins draws on Durkheim to get at the satisfying emotions
that arise from collective ritual and locomotion,
and which make participation in collective action so deeply satisfying,
in much the way that Durkheim talked about with collective effervescence.

Collins elaborates on the mutual attention of rituals,
and their ability to bond participants together.
So rituals generate both a feeling of solidarity with the group,
and an emotional energy for the individual.
These increase the likelihood of future interactions,
as individuals seek out the same pleasures.

He also recognizes that rituals can fail,
and instead generate feelings of shame and frustration,
or at the very least, of indifference.

I find this approach appealing because it is resolutely micro-level.
I think it also captures some of the pleasures of protest.

What it does not capture as well are the displays of emotions for others,
so in many ways it too is a neat complement to the Hochschild approach.
And it is not so interested in the residues, especially the moral emotions,
that might be generated in but also reflected in rituals,
but which have a life outside those face to face settings.
It is not so good on the moral satisfactions of mobilization,
except as these are filtered through the pleasures of physical presence.

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So, social movement theory has made small advances toward these theoretical perspectives,
but only small ones, except for Collins,
who has shaped his theory in part by writing about mobilization processes.

What has happened instead, to some extent,
is that the field of emotions and movements

has proceeded by examining the relevance of particular emotions:
works on fear, on anger, on love and hate.

This approach works especially well with a view of emotions as displays,
since a successful performance will itself typically highlight one emotion at a time,
as a way to clarify it, make it stand out.

But there is an underlying problem, namely,
we use the same term to cover too many different things:
there are very different kinds of emotions,
with different origins and dynamics.

Different people who write about emotions and politics
seem to be writing about utterly different things.

So I'd like to propose a typology of emotions that, I hope,
will show what different things have been grouped together.
In social life, they have different causes, dynamics, and effects.
Worse, we sometimes apply the same word to different types,
as when we use the term "fear" to refer
to the immediate reaction we have to a shadow we take to be a snake,
the feeling we have about the hazardous waste dump down the street,
and abiding anxieties over our children.

I suggest we divide emotions into several different categories.

The first we may not even want to call emotions at all.
These are bodily urges. Certain impulses well up from our bodies
with such force that they overpower our conscious intentions,
propelling us to act.
Elster, calling these "strong feelings," includes chemical addictions
as well as "hunger, thirst, and sexual desire; urges to urinate, defecate, or sleep;
as well as organic disturbances such as pain, fatigue, vertigo, and nausea."
These pressing urges are largely independent of culture and cognition,
although we may think about the object we desire and plan how to get it
(in the case of substances but not in that of fatigue).
We tend to ignore other possible goals until we have satisfied the urge.
We're at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

At one time, most emotions were viewed on this model, as "passions"
that propel us without any thought or resistance, as events that happen to us
in contrast to willed choice and action, derailing our reason.

But overpowering urges are a small subset of human emotion,
which perhaps should not even be dignified with that label.

What is more, such urges come in two forms.
One kind, centered on deprivation, focus our attention in such an immediate way
that they rarely influence political action–
except that they suggest how deprivation can crowd out political concerns.
Survival needs usually–but not always–crowd out other motivations.

But the other kind are satisfactions that can be met in multiple ways.
Immediate lust or addiction may crowd out other concerns,
but I may take elaborate steps to get to those final moments of pleasure.
Indeed, impressing potential lovers is a central human motivation.
Attaining a substance to satisfy an addiction is similar.

A lingering doubt remains: cannot any emotion, felt strongly enough,
overpower us in this way? Anger can,
and it is the usual exemplar given of an irrational passion.
But most forms of anger do not lead us astray, into actions we later regret.
Plus, most emotions do not have this power at all.
Affective allegiances, moods, and moral emotions are compatible with reasoning.

After urges, second, we have "reflex emotions."
These are quick to appear and quick to subside.
Anger, fear, joy, sadness, disgust, and surprise may well be universal,
as Paul Ekman has tried to show, and they may be hardwired into us,
operating through the hypothalamus and amygdala
rather than through parts of the cortex that evolved later.
They are automatic programs that include facial expressions,
vocal changes, bodily responses such as flinching,
and reactions of hormones and nerves.
As a result they may involve less thought than other emotions,
and so may be somewhat less affected by culture.

Yet even with reflex emotions, where neurology plays a big role,
a significant role still remains for culture, which is necessary to explain
exactly what disgusts or frightens us.
Cultural processes may also operate to partially block
some expressions of reflex emotions–
as with Ekman's famous experiments with Japanese students.

Affects are a 3rd type of emotion, more abiding and more tied to cognition.

Love and hate are the obvious ones, but trust, respect,
and some kinds of fear are also examples.
Quite the opposite of reflex responses to our physical environments,
affects are relatively longlasting orientations to the social and physical worlds.
They provide the goals of many of our purposive actions and projects,
And the building blocks of collective identity.

Moods are a 4th category, typically lasting longer than reflex emotions
but not as long as affects
(although moods can sometimes be almost permanent,
something like aspects of personal temperament).
We usually carry moods with us from one social setting to another,
perhaps because moods have biochemical states associated with them
(one reason that drugs affect them
and one reason individuals differ temperamentally).
The obvious contrast is between positive and negative moods,
which have been shown to affect actions and judgments.

In my 5th and final category are complex moral emotions,
which require a fair amount of cognitive processing.
They include Tom Scheff's favorites, shame and pride,
but also compassion, outrage, and more complex forms of disgust, fear, or anger
(which are cognitively processed more than the reflex forms).
The philosopher Jon Elster has written interestingly about these,
especially about humans' ability to have emotions about their emotions,
for example to feel ashamed about being angry or afraid.
This is the kind of reflexivity dear to social constructionists.

I would go so far as to say that moral principles and intuitions
only have an impact because of the emotions associated with them.
We don't follow our principles because we think they are right in a neutral way.
We follow them because it feels good to follow them,
in a way different from other feelings.
And of course, sometimes we follow them
because we are afraid of the consequences if we don't.

When we take any one of these categories as an ideal type
for how emotions work, we are in trouble.
Moods like fatalism or elation share few similarities with anger or disgust.
The dynamics of hatred differ quite a bit from those of shame.
Perhaps not all emotions fit easily into one category or another,
but I think the typology sensitizes us to important differences

and may even help us understand those that don't fit well.

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I think this typology can help us see some new directions
beginning to emerge,
and to make some suggestions about which of them seem fruitful.

So for example, we can see that most theories of emotions
involve two kinds of emotions:
one set is a relatively stable set of affective orientations:
these attachments tell us what we care about,
what we love and hate, what makes us anxious,
what we might fear or feel threatened by, or disgusted by.
These might include affective loyalties to collective identities,
to our nation, our religion, our profession, of our movement even.

But with these as background, in the sense that they change less often,
we also interact and gather information,
and have emotional reactions to what happens to us.

I originally tried to distinguish between the two kinds of emotions
by calling one affective loyalties, the other reactive emotions.
I would usually include moods as reactions, too,
and moral emotions as preexisting affective orientations.

Drawing on this kind of approach,
we can focus more on combinations of emotions.

So for example in my concept of a moral shock,
something happens that severely challenges our understanding of the world,
especially our moral understanding,
and it not only arouses some strong reactive emotions,
but opens us to rethinking and to setting things right again.
People might be more open to recruitment to a protest movement,
they might go out and seek out such a movement,
or even in extreme cases try to start one.

Or, instead, they might go into a kind of depression, a paralysis,
depending on the interpretive work they do in understanding and framing the shock.

This kind of emotional analysis is not entirely post hoc,
thanks to the preexisting affective loyalties, since
if we know these, we know something about where to expect shocks.
The symbols of the nation used to be sources of insult to one's honor.
Today, children are a key source: threats to children, damages to children
are places where moral shocks arise.

A pretty stretch of coastline resonates symbolically,
so that proposals for a nuclear reactor there are a shock –
especially if you have just bought a vacation home there.
Cultural analysis gives us a long list of possibilities:
foreigners, economic dislocations, the bottoms and tops of hierarchies,
polluted positions between categories, and so forth.
ACT can suggest any number of possibilities.

Political activists, after all, know what kind of appeals to make.

A similar line of analysis has developed in American political science,
mostly around the work of George Marcus.
He argues that when voters are anxious,
they pay more attention, and are more open to disconfirming evidence.
Their anxiety pushes them out of their normal voting routines,
which are largely ideological or partisan habits.

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There is another family of emotional interactions,
which I think of as emotional batteries:
this is a combination of positive and negative emotions,
which like batteries give a kind of push and pull,
sorting out the positive and the negative
and giving us a kind of direction of movement as a result.

So there is the familiar shame and pride dynamic often described
for the gay rights or anti-SIDA movement.

Or the fear-joy pairing of successful protest events,
which Randy Collins' ritual theory might be able to capture best.

In a way, this is a kind of synthesis of two generations of theory,
collective behavior and the more structural approach that followed it.
The collective behavior and crowd theorists tended to emphasize

negative emotions: the fears, anxieties, feelings of inadequacy,
factors that pushed, psychologically, from within.
The structural theorists, especially the American version developed by Tilly,
tended to see opportunities as the motivators,
institutional pull factors such as incorporation or economic gains,
in a kind of Progressive vision of history
as the increasing incorporation of more and more groups into national political arenas.

But both psychologically and rhetorically,
the positive and the negative work together,
it's the contrast between them that gives us some motivational energy.
One thing that renewed attention to emotions suggests
is that normal people have a range of positive and negative emotions,
that negative emotions do not imply psychopathology, as once thought.

I should point out that it might not make a difference
if we think of emotions as interior states
or as publicly displayed expressions and words.
The neurological methods used to demonstrate the ontological reality of emotions
are hard to apply to a demonstration or a meeting.
But I'm not sure we should conclude that the emotions don't exist
if we only see them on display.
This is what I call the anxiety of rhetoric,
which dates back to ancient Athens:
If we can see how orators socially construct arguments and claims,
and if we recognize that the same tools can be used to construct false as true claims,
then we feel vulnerable to a smooth orator.
(Or at least we are afraid that others are vulnerable.)

The ancients' solution was to say that, to be a good orator,
one had to be a good man.
But this is clearly false, or at least confounds
a technical sense of goodness with a moral one.

I'm not sure we should make too much of these ontological issues.
After all, are we any less sure of the reality of emotions
than we are of ideas and attitudes, entities that sociologists
use in a carefree manner?

I think we face the same difficulties with emotions as with cognitions:
the same problems of internal states and external displays,
the same imperfect relationship between individual and collective versions,

or of private and public settings for them,
as well as the same methodological challenges.

And in fact, virtually nothing we study has had the same kind of
neurological demonstration of its reality that emotions have,
as they have been traced through brain scans even as they are occurring;
we can "see" them happening in different parts of the brain.

This kind of evidence has not been linked up with mobilizations yet,
but that does not mean it could not be, or even that it never will be.

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We don't have to deny the reality of emotions as internal states,
in order to study them as external displays.
But we do need to recognize that they are inextricably linked to strategic action.

Affective loyalties are central to our goals;
various reflex emotions and moods are a large part of our means.
Above all, moods affect our levels of energy for action,
in ways Durkheim and Collins have described.

Let me get at a small part of this through the type of rhetoric
that the Greeks called epideictic,
or display rhetoric in Aristotle's term, especially since
this is central to Stephane Latte's thesis being defended tomorrow.

A number of strategic dilemmas have to do with cultural or emotional meanings,
with impressions and how to manage them.

A lot of strategy is about character definition,
how to characterize yourself and others.
I mean this in a literal way, or a literary way.
Certain individuals or groups get defined as villains,
others as heros, still others as victims.

["character table"]

Characters are interesting because they tell us what we should feel about them
as well as what we should think about them.
We are supposed to hate the villain, pity the victim,
and admire the hero.

We don't always conform to these social norms –
there are lovable villains and creepy heroes –
but we always know what the norms are.

These character types also suggest plots:
the hero saves the victims from the villains.
Victims are usually innocent, weak, in need of the hero.

Other plots involve movement from one cell to another:
martyrs are victims who become heroes;
converts are villains who become heroes.

Some players do well playing the hero, others by being the victim,
but some also by being the villain, by intimidating others.
Some even work well as clowns.

So even in characterization, there are dilemmas.
If you present yourself as TOO strong,
you don't need other people's help.

If you portray the villains as too strong,
there may be nothing to do to stop them,
or fear may overwhelm indignation.

You often have to balance or choose between being hero or victim.
Take the movement against child abuse, which Nancy Whittier has studied.
Do the adult survivors present themselves as victims,
returning to their roles as children in order to gain sympathy,
or do they present themselves as strong, as fighting back, as heroes?
TV shows have given survivors teddy bears, to follow the first strategy,
but many survivors reject that victim framing
to show that they have overcome their abuse,
and can organize against it.

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In sum, emotions and strategy
have long been seen as opposites.
But this is only because we've misconstrued both of them,
seeing emotions as irrational passions
and strategy as a narrow form of calculating rationality.

Emotions are at the heart of strategic action,
because what they do, in a way,
is to link us to a series of contexts:
Urges link us to our own bodies.
Reflex emotions to events in our immediate physical environment;
Affects animate our relationships to a broad social environment,
symbolic as well as physical;
moral emotions also relate us to a very broad symbolic world;
Moods, finally, either energize
or otherwise color all these connections.

Emotions show us why we would care enough about the world to act in it,
to engage in political action at all.

Both emotions and strategic interaction are about
connecting us thoroughly with the several worlds around us.
They are about action IN context, in the pragmatic sense.
This is why emotions promise
a fundamental rethinking of human action,
overcoming dualisms of structure and action,
or rational and irrational, that have misled us for so long.