

<https://doi.org/10.31891/PT-2025-2-7>

UDC 159.942:159.928(091)

Dmytro BIHUNOV

Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Rivne State University of the Humanities

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6100-7765>

e-mail: bihunov.d@gmail.com

ROOTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Despite the rapid development of research on emotional intelligence, its historical roots remain poorly understood. Enlightenment thinkers, seeking to unify reason and feeling, laid important philosophical foundations that today can be seen as early forms of the concept of emotional intelligence. Scholars of that era emphasised the importance of emotions not only as a source of morality, but also as a tool for personal development and social interaction. Recognising, managing, using and understanding emotions – these key aspects of modern emotional intelligence have deep historical roots dating back to Enlightenment thinkers. Studying their views not only allows us to better understand the nature of emotional intelligence, but also broadens the horizons of humanistic knowledge by linking psychology with philosophy, ethics, and history.

Key words: emotional intelligence, Enlightenment, emotions, reason, control.

Дмитро БІГУНОВ

Рівненський державний гуманітарний університет

ВИТОКИ ЕМОЦІЙНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ: ЕПОХА ПРОСВІТНИЦТВА

Незважаючи на стрімкий розвиток досліджень у сфері емоційного інтелекту, його історичне коріння залишається недостатньо вивченим. Мислителі епохи Просвітництва, прагнучи об'єднати розум і почуття, заклали важливі філософські засади, які сьогодні можна розглядати як ранні форми концепції емоційного інтелекту.

Так, Б. Франклін і Вольтер наголошували на важливості використання емоцій для самовдосконалення і суспільного блага. Д. Юм стверджував, що саме емоції, а не розум, лежать в основі людської природи, а їхнє розуміння потрібне для формування моралі та уникнення ірраціональної поведінки. Ж.-Ж. Руссо підкреслював роль почуттів у становленні особистості та гармонії з природою, вважаючи, що внутрішня чутливість сприяє моральному розвитку. А. Сміт наголошував на значущості почуттів у міжособистісних відносинах, розглядаючи симпатію як ключ до формування довіри і громадського порядку. Він вважав, що здатність співпереживати іншим необхідна для формування соціальних норм. І. Кант і Д. Локк зосередили увагу на контролі та управлінні емоціями. Обидва мислителі вважали, що розум має спрямовувати емоції, забезпечуючи внутрішню гармонію і доброчесну поведінку.

Таким чином, філософія Просвітництва являє собою важливу інтелектуальну передумову до появи ідеї емоційного інтелекту. Мислителі тієї епохи наголошували на значущості емоцій не лише як джерела моралі, а й як інструменту особистісного розвитку та соціальної взаємодії. Усвідомлення, управління, використання та розуміння емоцій – ці ключові аспекти сучасного емоційного інтелекту мають глибоке історичне

коріння, яке сягає мислителів епохи Просвітництва. Вивчення їхніх поглядів дає змогу не тільки краще зрозуміти природу емоційного інтелекту, а й розширює горизонти гуманітарного знання, пов'язуючи психологію з філософією, етикою та історією.

Ключові слова: емоційний інтелект, Просвітництво, емоції, розум, контроль.

INTRODUCTION

It should be noted that modern psychology considers emotional intelligence primarily from a practical perspective – focusing on personal effectiveness, interpersonal dynamics, education, and psychotherapy. However, without considering its historical roots, our understanding remains incomplete. A historical lens makes it possible to trace the evolution of ideas about emotions – from philosophical reflections to scientific inquiry – and reveals how concepts such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and moral maturity have developed over centuries.

Originally, emotions were viewed not as psychological skills but as part of ethical and moral philosophy. In ancient thought, philosophers like Plato and the Stoics emphasized the importance of harmony between reason and emotion as a condition for inner balance. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, humanist thinkers underscored the value of self-knowledge and emotional control as paths to spiritual and moral fulfilment. These ideas resonate with today's understanding of emotional maturity, which includes reflection, empathy, and the conscious regulation of one's emotional states.

With the rise of psychology, particularly psychoanalysis, emotions came to be understood as complex and often unconscious experiences, rooted in deep internal conflicts. Working through them has opened the way toward emotional awareness as a process of achieving psychological well-being and personal growth. In this context, emotional intelligence becomes more than a set of applied skills – it serves as a foundation for inner transformation.

Thus, the development of ideas about emotions – from ancient philosophy to modern science – shows that the ability to recognize, to understand, and to guide one's emotions is a vital part of both personal growth and social adaptation. Emotional intelligence as a modern construct emerged from a historical need to explore the nature of emotions and its role in human life – not merely for efficiency, but in pursuit of a deeper understanding of oneself and others. It integrates the legacy of many cultures, eras, and schools of thought, emphasizing that emotions are not obstacles to reason, but its partners in the development of the self.

The Enlightenment era plays a particularly significant role in this context, as thinkers of the time began to radically reconsider the nature of the human being, aiming to integrate rationality and emotionality into a unified vision of moral and social progress. It is in the works of eighteenth-century philosophers – from John Locke to David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

– that we find the foundational ideas of emotion, empathy, self-regulation, and moral judgment that have directly influenced today's concept of emotional intelligence.

Thus, **the aim of the article** is to outline the historical development of the concept of emotional intelligence during the Enlightenment and to analyse its philosophical and cultural roots.

PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN MATERIAL

During the Enlightenment (the 17th – 18th centuries), thinking about emotions begins to evolve towards a greater value of sensitivity and empathy, which also influences the concept of emotional intelligence. Philosophers begin to argue that emotions are an important part of human nature and have significance for moral development. Therefore, emotions come to be seen as not only an important but also a constructive element of human life, which creates the basis for understanding emotional intelligence as a component of personal maturity.

One of the early Enlightenment thinkers who has brought a new perspective on emotions by focusing on their role in cognition and moral life is John Locke. Locke argues that all knowledge, including emotional experience, is formed through sense experience. He denies the existence of innate ideas and feelings, arguing that emotions develop under the influence of upbringing and environment: *“Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas [...] from experience.”* [5, II.i.2]. In *“Some Thoughts Concerning Education”*, Locke emphasises the importance of early development of a child's ability to control emotions: *“The sooner you treat him as a man, the sooner he will begin to be one.”* [6, §95], and he sees restraint in expressing emotions as the key to creating a virtuous person.

However, his ideas can also be seen as one of the first steps towards the concept of emotional intelligence – the ability to identify, to analyse and to control both one's own emotions and the emotions of others. Locke emphasises that reason should guide feelings, and it is this balance between rationality and emotional self-regulation that essentially underpins emotional competence: *“The will is determined by the mind, directing its thought to the side which, upon consideration, it finds to have the greater good or the lesser evil.”* [5, II. xxi.35].

It is a well-known fact that contemporary psychologist Daniel Goleman, one of the leading theorists of emotional intelligence, identifies its key components as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills [2]. Speaking about John Locke it cannot but mention that although he does not articulate these categories directly, his idea of the

importance of cultivating the ability to control emotions closely resonates with the notion of self-regulation, and his emphasis on rational evaluation of feelings resonates with self-awareness. In addition, elements of empathy and understanding of the emotions of others can be seen in Locke's thinking about moral education and social responsibility.

Thus, despite the historical distance, Locke's views provide a solid foundation for contemporary research on emotional intelligence. His approach helps to conceptualise emotional development as part of a broader strategy for developing a mature, responsible and ethically oriented individual.

Building on Locke's emphasis on experience and the shaping of emotions through education and environment, Voltaire expands these ideas within the broader framework of Enlightenment humanism. While deeply influenced by Locke's empirical approach, Voltaire places a greater focus on the social and ethical dimensions of emotions, seeing them not merely as reactions to experience, but as forces that must be refined through reason for the benefit of both the individual and society [9].

Like Locke, Voltaire sees emotions as a part of the human experience that should be enlightened rather than suppressed. He also emphasises the importance of a balance between emotion and reason, believing that man must learn to control his feelings for the public good. Voltaire sharply criticises religious fanaticism, which he believes is rooted in excessive emotionality, seeing it as a threat to reason and progress [9].

As it is seen, Voltaire's views can be interpreted as anticipating contemporary ideas about emotional intelligence. His insistence on critical thinking, self-awareness and social responsibility echoes the ideas of such components of emotional intelligence as self-regulation and social awareness. Voltaire does not deny the importance of feelings, but seeks to show that without the ability to manage emotions intelligently, one becomes vulnerable to manipulation, fear, and aggression – the foundations of irrational beliefs and fanaticism. Voltaire favours the development not only of reason but also of humanity based on empathy and respect for the freedom of the other. In this sense, his position is close to the concept of empathy as a key element of moral and social intelligence. An emotionally mature person, in essence, for Voltaire, is one who is able to critically evaluate his or her feelings, to distinguish impulsive reactions from ethically justified actions, and to make decisions with both reason and compassion in mind.

Like Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin recognizes the importance of regulating emotions for personal and social improvement. While Voltaire emphasizes emotional refinement through reason and moral reflection, Franklin translates these ideals into practical strategies for self-discipline and

emotional growth, laying an early foundation for the concept of emotional intelligence in everyday life.

Benjamin Franklin believes that to achieve success and moral excellence, a person must develop self-discipline and control his emotions. He proposes a system of personal virtues including moderation, humility, and determination. Franklin recommends managing emotions through self-analysis and rational planning, which echoes modern concepts of emotional intelligence [1].

Franklin doesn't just call for control of feelings, but sees emotional self-management as a path to personal effectiveness and harmony with others. His practice of keeping a daily journal in which he tracks progress on each virtue actually exemplifies mindfulness and emotional self-reflection. He realises that stable character is not built through suppressing emotions, but through understanding them and gradually bringing them into alignment with values and goals [1].

In addition, Franklin emphasises the importance of interpersonal skills – such as tact, diplomacy and respect for other points of view. These qualities, now categorised as social intelligence, he develops consciously, believing them to be the foundation of social trust and leadership. Thus, his approach combines rationality with emotional maturity, and the pursuit of moral self-improvement with an understanding of the inner life of the individual.

While Franklin considers emotions as elements to be managed through reason and discipline, David Hume shifts the perspective by placing emotions at the very core of human nature. Moving beyond control and regulation, Hume explores how feelings such as sympathy drive moral judgment and social connection – key aspects of what we now consider emotional intelligence.

Hume believes that emotions, not reason, are the driving force behind human behaviour and the basis of moral judgement. In “A Treatise on Human Nature”, he writes that reason is subordinate to feelings because only they can motivate action. His famous phrase “*Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions*” [3, II.iii.3] emphasises the idea that reason serves as a tool to achieve goals set by emotional motivation.

It should also be noted that Hume emphasises sympathy as the mechanism by which we perceive and share the feelings of others. Although he does not use the term ‘empathy’ (as the term itself does not appear until the early 20th century) in the modern sense, his understanding of sympathy has much in common with key components of emotional intelligence, including emotional sensitivity, recognition of another person's emotions, and moral responsiveness. In his view, it is the capacity for sympathy and

emotional attunement that forms the foundation of moral consciousness and makes social interaction possible.

In turn, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that emotions are a natural and integral part of human nature, surpassing reason in importance. In his writings, especially 'Émile, or On Education', he emphasises the importance of developing emotional sensitivity in children as the basis for the formation of their moral consciousness. Rousseau believes that it is emotions such as love, compassion and charity that form a moral personality and allow a person to remain connected to nature and to other people.

Emotional sensitivity, according to Rousseau, is not just an innate quality, but something that requires careful nurturing. He actually anticipates the ideas of emotional intelligence, speaking of the need to develop in a child the ability to recognise and understand his feelings, as well as the ability to sympathise with others. In 'Émile' Rousseau writes that education should be based not only on reason, but also on the heart, because it is through feelings that a person becomes truly moral: *"It is the weakness of man's reason which brings him to depend on the opinion of others... but it is the goodness of his heart which binds him to them."* [7].

Rousseau criticises the Age of Enlightenment for over-reliance on rationalism, believing that the fascination with reason and science can lead to the suppression of natural human feelings. In this he sees the source of moral degradation, social coldness and loss of authenticity. For Rousseau, harmony between emotion and reason is not the subordination of one to the other, but a return to the natural emotional sincerity that makes authentic moral relationships possible.

In contrast to Rousseau's celebration of natural emotion as a moral compass, Immanuel Kant considers emotions with greater caution. While acknowledging their presence in human experience, Kant emphasizes the primacy of reason in guiding moral action, viewing emotional impulses as secondary to rational duty – an important counterpoint in the evolving understanding of emotional intelligence.

Thus, Kant regards emotions as an important but subordinate aspect of human nature. In his ethical system, reason plays the leading role in determining moral behaviour. He clearly distinguishes between affects – fleeting and often disruptive emotional surges – and passions, which are enduring emotional states that can dominate and compromise reason. Both, in his view, threaten the autonomy of the individual, as they undermine one's ability for moral self-determination.

Nevertheless, Kant does not reject emotions entirely. While moral actions should not be driven by feelings, emotional responsiveness can arise as a consequence of moral behaviour. For instance, one may experience

respect for the moral law – an emotion that, according to Kant, is both rational and affective. It is not imposed externally, but emerges from within as a result of freely chosen moral duty. In this sense, respect can be seen as a kind of emotional response shaped by reason, and as an early articulation of moral emotional maturity.

In his ‘Critique of the Power of Judgment’, Kant also explores the emotions evoked by aesthetic experience. He connects the feeling of the sublime with moral growth, arguing that such emotions lead us to recognize our insignificance in the face of nature’s grandeur, while simultaneously affirming the greatness of reason, which allows us to grasp this vastness. These “sublime” feelings represent an aesthetic form of emotional reflection that brings the individual closer to moral freedom. In this way, Kant’s philosophy resonates with contemporary ideas of emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, interpret, and guide one’s emotions in support of personal and ethical development [4].

Whereas Kant prioritizes reason as the basis for moral judgment, Adam Smith brings emotions back to the centre of ethical life. By emphasizing sympathy as a key mechanism of moral understanding and social cohesion, Smith highlights the interpersonal dimensions of emotion – anticipating modern views of emotional intelligence as rooted in empathy and relational awareness.

In ‘The Theory of Moral Sentiments’, Adam Smith argues that moral judgments are not grounded in reason, but in feelings, particularly in sympathy (which today we might understand as empathy). He believes that the ability to share in the emotions of others – to observe their feelings from the outside and imaginatively place oneself in their position – is the foundation of moral behaviour [8]. This idea closely anticipates modern conceptions of emotional intelligence, where the capacity to recognize and interpret others’ emotions is seen as essential to moral maturity and social functioning.

Smith emphasizes that emotions such as pride, shame, admiration, and compassion play a crucial role in shaping social norms, as they guide individual behaviour and encourage people to seek the approval of an “impartial spectator” – an internalized moral compass. This notion implies the presence of an inner emotional self-regulation mechanism, through which individuals evaluate their own actions by imagining how they would be perceived by others. This can be interpreted as an early account of emotional self-awareness, a key component of emotional intelligence [8].

Thus, for Smith, morality is not the result of abstract reasoning, but of living emotional engagement between individuals. He believes that the development of emotional sensitivity, empathy, and the capacity for moral

reflection is what sustains social cohesion and supports the creation of a just and humane society.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up mentioned above, it can be noted that Enlightenment thinkers laid the groundwork for modern approaches to the study of emotions, emphasizing their importance in morality, social interaction, and personal development. While medieval philosophers often sought to subordinate emotions to religious doctrine, Enlightenment scholars pursued a more balanced view – one that recognized emotions as a vital part of human nature to be understood, refined, and ethically integrated.

The ideas of John Locke, Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith collectively shaped a nuanced vision of emotional life. From Locke's emphasis on emotional formation through experience to Hume's insight into sympathy as the basis of morality and Rousseau's belief in emotional authenticity, each contributed essential perspectives. Franklin introduced practical methods of emotional self-regulation; Kant explored the moral tension between reason and feeling; and Smith highlighted the role of empathy in sustaining ethical societies.

Together, these Enlightenment contributions foreshadowed many principles of what we now call emotional intelligence – the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and apply emotions in ways that promote self-awareness, moral reasoning, and meaningful human connection. Their legacy continues to inform how we view the emotional mind not as a force to be suppressed, but as a central component of what it means to be a thoughtful, ethical, and socially attuned human being.

References

1. Franklin, B. Benjamin Franklin: The autobiography and other writings. New York: Penguin, 2001. 352 p.
2. Goleman, D. Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. 352 p.
3. Hume, D. A Treatise of Human Nature / ed.: David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 744 p.
4. Kant, E. Critique of the Power of Judgment / ed.: Paul Guyer; trans.: Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 423 p.
5. Locke, J. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding / ed.: P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. 924 p.
6. Locke, J. Some Thoughts Concerning Education. London: Forgotten Books, 2012. 320 p.
7. Rousseau, J.-J. Émile, or On Education / intro, trans. & notes by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979. 501 p.
8. Smith, A. The Theory of Moral Sentiments / intro E. G. West. New York: Dover Publications, 2006 368 p.
9. Voltaire. Letters On The English Or Lettres Philosophiques. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2010. 88 p.