Nancy Sherman’s paper is a sensitive examination of Aristotle’s account of the emotions in relation to virtue. Her starting point is Aristotle’s claim that character is assessed in terms of emotion as well as action (the “mean” applies to both); and so it must be that emotion has a role to play in ethical life. But Sherman’s paper does more than locate the emotions within the framework of Aristotelian ethics. She wants to establish a more fundamental claim (one which finds intuitive support): that emotions are “central to morality” (p. 2). She knows that Kantian considerations (with intuitive support of their own) make it difficult to accept such a claim. Hence the need for an account of the emotions, and of their relation to virtue, which overcomes this resistance.

This is what Sherman sets out to give us, and it is a welcome attempt. For while it is clear that Aristotle takes emotions seriously, it is also clear that there are serious gaps in his account of them. Meanwhile, contemporary moral philosophy remains uncertain about the emotions. Sherman’s efforts to understand Aristotle promise to contribute something to our contemporary understanding of ethics. While I sympathize with these efforts, I’m not sure the promise is entirely fulfilled. My remarks will focus on the following points: 1) the claim that emotions are ethically important and the Kantian objections to that claim, 2) the account of the emotions that is presented to meet those objections, 3) the problem of responsibility or “control” and
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Sherman's proposal as to how that problem might be overcome. It seems to me that serious and unanswered questions are raised at each of these points.

I.

Let us start with what is supposed to be problematic about the claim that emotions are ethically important. According to Sherman, the Kantian objection is roughly fourfold: there is the "partiality" of emotion; the unreliability and instability of emotion; the idea that emotions are involuntary; and finally, the fact that emotions involve attachments to things that lie beyond our control. But this list fails to capture the most important consideration for Kant: that emotion (like desire or inclination) can have no constitutive role in morality. The reasons for this go beyond considerations of reliability or control. Kant insisted that there be an internal connection between a moral motive and an action's moral worth. Emotions cannot guarantee this connection: even where emotions are inculcated as habits, broadened in their scope, and sufficiently refined to give the agent some handle on their expression, they cannot ensure the performance of morally correct action. Barbara Herman (Herman 1983, 234-35) has expressed the point in the following way: "It is not that someone who acted from emotion would frequently fail to act rightly . . . The connection between [e.g.] sympathy and helping someone is not accidental; the connection between helping someone and doing what is right is. All helping actions are not also right actions . . . ."

I emphasize this point because it raises a question which I believe Sherman's paper doesn't clearly answer: that is, in what sense should we consider emotions to be ethically important? Sherman notes that, as moral agents, we care not only about how we act, but also about how we feel. This is in keeping with Aristotle's claim that character is expressed through emotion as well as action, that both are subject to ethical assessment. But so far, this provides a fairly weak and open-ended explanation of how and why emotion should be a focus of moral concern. There seems to be more at stake here than the question of