

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF EMOTION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. Emotions are also widely thought to be adaptive, insofar as they are purposeful and meaningful for an individual, and reflect an evaluative engagement with the environment that helps one prepare for specific actions.

Key words: emotions, adaptive, actions

INTRODUCTION

The term emotion, stemming from the Latin *emovere* (to move out or agitate), broadly refers to those affective upheavals in experience that are directed at events or objects in the world and that often prompt us to act in specific ways vis-à-vis these events or objects. Since antiquity, these episodes have been branded by labels like shame, anger, fear, joy, embarrassment, or disgust, and classed into categories. Historically, Darwin's (1872) *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was one of the most influential scholarly works to inform prominent understandings of emotion in many academic disciplines. Across disciplines, there is broad consensus that emotions are discrete in kind; that is, they are characterized by specific configurations of phenomenal experience, bodily changes, expressions, and action tendencies. Emotions are also widely thought to be adaptive, insofar as they are purposeful and meaningful for an individual, and reflect an evaluative engagement with the environment that helps one prepare for specific actions. Related to this capacity, emotions are generally presumed to fulfill communicative purposes, for instance through facial or vocal expressions, which is why they are deemed essential to social interaction. Following Darwin's work, two major debates have refined contemporary understandings of emotion. William James (1884) held that emotions are, first and foremost, a specific class of feelings, to be distinguished from related concepts such as moods, sensations, and sentiments. Emotions according to this view are the subjective feelings associated with bodily changes and expressive behaviors. Hence, as James (p. 190) famously put it, "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble"-and not vice versa. An almost diametrically opposed shift in understanding emotion is linked to a well-known experiment by Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer (1962), based on which they proposed that only thoughts and cognitions, specifically the interpretation and labeling of events (including bodily changes), can bring about a specific emotion. More recent scholarship has increasingly sought to integrate key insights of these feeling-based and cognitive accounts, resulting in innovative perspectives that emphasize the embodied and socially constituted nature of emotion, which we outline in detail in our own approach. Importantly, in this approach, emotions should be considered part of an integrated conceptual field that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling. Roughly, whereas "affect" stands for pre-categorical relational dynamics and "feeling" for the subjective-experiential dimension of these affective relations, "emotion" signifies consolidated and categorically circumscribed sequences of affective world-relatedness.



Although there still are many different ways of understanding the concept of emotion and much disagreement remains as to its theoretical elaboration, a minimal consensus can be identified across traditions and paradigms. As a starting ground, this consensus has also proven to be exceptionally fruitful for an understanding of societies as affective societies. Emotions thus are conceived of as object- or situation- directed affective compartments that are sorted into culturally established and linguistically labeled categories or prototypes, such as, for instance, fear, anger, happiness, grief, envy, pride, shame, and guilt. These emotion categories mirror specific kinds of evaluative world-relations, for example a relation to imminent danger in the case of fear, to an offense in the case of indignation, or to a severe loss in the case of grief. Needless to say, these evaluations need not be unambiguous, but can be fuzzy, ambivalent, or even contradictory, often resulting in experiences of mixed feelings and emotions (e.g., Heavey et al., 2017). Hence, emotions also reflect concerns of various sorts, from more abstract goals and desires, for example for social status or recognition, to more basic needs such as freedom from harm or bodily integrity. Whatever theoretical differences are prevalent among researchers, we hold that a workable understanding of emotion must accommodate this category- specific directedness to salient classes of events or objects. Emotions thus are inherently relational categories. They are cognitive and affective processes unfolding along the lines of a categorically circumscribed evaluative relation, linking an actor or a group to specific matters of concern. Thus, for example, the emotion type fear comprises those affective processes and appraisals for which individuals or groups are affected by an imminent danger; anger comprises those thoughts and affective dynamics that relate an individual or a group to a harmful offense or transgression, while grief comprises dynamics that relate an individual or a group to a situation of significant loss (cf. Helm, 2001). Hence, emotion categories cannot be said to denote processes “inside” individuals or capitalize on some social or material “outside.” Rather, they are indicative of situational entanglements and the relational constitution of actors, situations, and evaluative orientations. This constitutive embeddedness is also reflected in recent works stressing the enactive nature of emotions (Krueger & Szanto, 2016; Slaby, 2014).

The idea of emotions reflecting specific situational entanglements also suggests that emotions are episodic. In contrast to moods or sentiments (→ sentiments), emotion categories mirror situational – rather than the dispositional – affective world- relations. Importantly, situational here means “from the first- person-perspective” and is not limited to physical space or an ongoing interaction (Goldie, 2002). For example, recurrent depreciation can be seen as an unbearable situation and produce lasting shame about the self. Similarly, an insult in a face- to-face conversation provokes anger at someone else that is soon dampened by an apology. Understanding emotions as situational and episodic is also in- line with the view that emotions are usually linked to feelings (→ feelings). When we say we are angry, sad, or proud of something, others usually have an immediate idea of what it feels like to be in a state of anger, sadness, or pride. In how far feelings are “at the core” of an emotion or in fact necessary for them is a question that reflects the different positions of James on the one hand, and Schachter and Singer on the other, and is still much discussed (e.g., Prinz, 2005). Instead of arguing that conscious phenomenal experience is a necessary ingredient of an emotion, we suggest a perspective from which emotions are predominantly realizations and conceptualizations of affect (→ affect). Aligning our understanding of affect with the domain of human bodies and phenomenal experience, we can interpret an actor’s situatedness as a specific “mode of being” and an evaluative bodily orientation toward the world. Affect in this view is related to the idea of finding oneself in the world amidst the forces that enable or hinder one’s thriving and one’s capacity to act. As a complex bodily stance, affective compartment is not necessarily focused on a specific object, but rather reflects an agent’s entire world- directedness in the sense of a specific “affective intentionality” (Slaby, 2008). Importantly, as part of an emotion,



these bodily feelings may be directed toward objects and events in the world (expressing Goldie's (2002) idea of "feeling towards") and eventually become categorized and labeled as an emotion. Contrary to some prominent proposals from the cultural studies branch of affect theorizing (e.g., Massumi, 2002), affect and emotion in this perspective are not systematically opposed. Instead, the relationship is that of a constructive interplay. Affect is a dynamic building block, potentially transgressing normatively prescribed and learned ways of relating to the world, eliding any "inside" versus "outside" distinction. Affect may bring about and intensify emotion episodes, for instance when grief, disgust, or anger build up to such a degree that little remains of the composure and sense-making capacities of the experiencing subject.

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