

Emotions as cognitive products

The classical literature on emotions in Philosophy and Linguistics has a history of pairing emotions and emotional content with propositional attitudes. However, as various scholars have already pointed out (Ben-Ze'ev, 2001; Goldie, 2000; Stocker & Hegeman, 1996), this leads to some important theoretical problems, either with the way in which we characterize something as being an *emotion*, or with the very definition of the notion of *propositional attitude*. There is no actual consensus about how we can correctly characterize emotions, mostly because of their complexity. In a similar way, the classical notion of propositional attitude understood as a relation between agents and propositions (on the linguistic side at least) is problematic. This presentation aims to shed light on some of the issues encountered and to propose some new insights on how we can resolve these issues.

Stocker (Stocker & Hegeman, 1996) has shown that propositional attitudes are not good candidates for studying emotions. Indeed, he showed, with his *Fear of Flying Objection*, that propositional attitudes are not sufficient to account for the complexity of emotional occurrences. Notably, they do not account for what seem to be cognitive inconsistencies: the well-known fact that one can reasonably and rationally consider planes as the safest mean of transportation and still be absolutely afraid of boarding one. Moreover, affirming that emotions do have something in common with propositional attitudes would entail a correlation between the presence of both of these entities in experiencers (Dowty, 1989), and so this would entail that experiencing emotions is linked somehow to the ability to grasp propositions. But the problem here is that creatures who don't have language cannot grasp propositions or have propositional attitudes and so, this would imply that they could not experience emotions, as shown by (Deigh, 1994). But we know as a fact that small children and animals do have emotional experiences.

This example is one of the many attempts to show that emotional content cannot be propositional content. Nevertheless, the idea continues to live because it has some clear theoretical advantages. Notably, the association of emotions with propositional attitudes allows the mapping of the former with other kinds of cognitive phenomena like

judgments (Neu, 2002; Nussbaum, 2003; Solomon, 2004), or desires (Marks, 1982; Oakley, 1992), or even a mixing between several of these phenomena (Faucher & Tappolet, 2007) – because these do involve propositional attitudes as shown by (Lycan, 2012). Cognitivists have also pointed the limitations of the propositional attitude model by showing that when experiencing an emotion, what is experienced goes beyond propositional content (as shown (Faucher & Tappolet, 2008; Goldie, 2000; Wollheim, 1999)).

My thesis is that emotional content can sometimes emerge in response to propositional content, but is not of propositional nature in itself. Instead, I propose emotions to be *cognitive products* in the sense developed by (Twardowski, 1979). The Polish philosopher, following Brentano, makes a distinction between an act and the product of this act. This distinction is important since the very nature of the two elements is different, hence a difference in their properties. In the case in which we are interested in, the *act* is the act of feeling something, of reacting to a real or imagined event, and the *product* of this act is the corresponding emotion. There is a cognitive action because if the feeling cannot be avoided, the product is submitted to a cognitive evaluation in terms of its (possible) occurrence. For example, one can be cut by a newcomer in the waiting line and so feel something, but the building up of anger is not directly implied by the event. I believe new perspectives can come from a clear distinction between an act and the content it produces. Moreover, this distinction echoes the way neurosciences consider emotions and their productions (Damasio, 2005).

The notion of cognitive product allows for a better understanding of what emotions are. What is more, they permit a better encompassing of the complexity of emotional occurrences and their properties. Indeed, the intentional and temporal parts of emotions are not quite resolved in fields like Philosophy or Linguistics. Are all emotions directed to an object? The answer is of course not, extreme kind of emotions are not, so what does that say about the general intentionality of emotions? The duration of the feeling is a certain amount of time, which is different from the duration of the emotion in itself; and all emotions have a different duration. Actually, even for one emotion the duration is not stable. Twardowski's theory gives an answer to those

questions, and also overcome the limitations suffered by the propositional attitudes model, notably the agentivity problem it entails. The strength of the cognitive product approach resides in its ability to address problems both at the philosophical and linguistics levels.

Emotions and their manifestations are impacted by socio-cultural factors, and this does add a very complex obstacle to emotion studies. A good example of this is *fear* that derived from what happen when we are facing a ferocious wild animal in a forest, to the dreaded experience of realizing that our phone batteries are at 1% and it will shut itself down, cutting us from who knows what. Now we can say there are at least two forms of fear: the survival instinct but also a form that we could assimilate to the concept of angst, that actually encompasses the major part of the fear occurrences we humans feel in our modern lives. This kind of evolution of a basic emotion illustrates the need for a broader characterization of what an emotion is. It also shows the need for a broader consideration of what counts for a property given the ever-growing complexity of the concept. But there are obviously universals, Ekman's list (Friesen, Ellsworth, & Ekman, 1972) of basic emotions for example, and they allow us to have a solid ground. From those universals, I build a comparative reflexion between the cognitivist hypothesis and the notion of cognitive product to show that the latter is a better candidate, more suited for the understanding of emotions, both at the philosophical and the linguistics levels.

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