

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Class 2-3: The Philosophy of Emotions II:

- * Debate as to what constitutes an emotion focuses on several different factors (e.g. rationality vs. physiological “feeling”);
- * Most theories incorporate several elements (e.g. “two factor theory”);
- * Moving beyond “inner” criteria: it is also important to consider behavioral and social aspects;
- * Hence, in what follows I will:
 - (1) Review 5 general models of emotion
 - (2) Review 10 problems with philosophical theories.

Five Models of Emotion:

- * The following problems led to classifying theories into types:
 - (1) Distinguishing emotions and other mental phenomena (e.g. physical agitation, sensory perceptions, and value judgements);
 - (2) Classifying emotions into generic types (e.g. similar and different; mild vs. violent);
 - (3) The significance of the physiological basis of emotion;
 - (4) The role emotions play -or should play- in our moral/practical lives
- * It comes down to analysis of emotion into its components or aspects.
- * Five important approaches to the analysis of emotion include:

Sensation theories;	Behavioral theories;	Cognitive theories.
Physiological theories;	Evaluative theories;	

(1) + (2) **Sensation and physiological theories:**

- * Both stress the actual “feel” of an emotion;
- * Disagree over whether it is primarily a psychological feeling (e.g. of being overwhelmed) or a feeling of actual physiological changes (e.g. one’s stomach churning in disgust).
- * Causal explanations figure prominently in both, outside of any explanation based on conscious reflection.
- * Begin from the observation that mental and physical agitation, excitement and arousal frequently accompany emotional experiences.
- * Sensation theorists only interested in psychological experience; physiological theorists focus on physiological changes as well. Examples:
 - David Hume: sensations accompanying emotions; calm vs. violent emotions
 - William James: an emotion is nothing but the perception of physiological disturbances in the body.
- * Problems:

Physiological disturbances may be necessary, but not sufficient

Maybe necessary only for “occurrent” vs. “dispositional” emotions

Extensive use of causal analysis without consciousness:
contingent tie with associated features

(3) **Behavioral Theories:**

- * Emotion as observable behavior, not private experience.

* Emotions are either the cause of behaviors, or actually consist of behavior.

* Consists of both deliberate and voluntary actions and innate, reflexive behaviors.

* Theories go back to Charles Darwin's study of emotional behavior, habit, and their utility for emotional expression for the survival of the fittest.

* While not a behavioral theorist, Darwin's work highlighted need for account of emotion and behavior.

* John Dewey: focus on situation vs. innate emotion as explanation for emotional behavior

* Other problems with view of emotions as innate/expressed in behavior:

- individual has privileged access to emotions vs. being unable to detect one's own mistakes/Freudian analyses;

- meaning often confirmed inferentially as situation unfolds

* Behavioral theorists (Ryle; Skinner) avoid these problems by arguing that behavior and the disposition to behave actually constitute the emotion.

(4) Evaluative Theories:

*What we feel about other people, events, and things in our lives generally indicates how we value them;

* Logical connection between emotions and evaluative beliefs vs. view that emotions in fact *are* evaluations. Variations:

- (1) Emotions are or resemble unspoken value judgements or beliefs (Sartre + Solomon);

- (2) Emotions are perceptions of value (Scheler + Hutcheson);

- (3) Emotions are simply pleasant or unpleasant sensations or pro- or con-

attitudes on which we formulate our value beliefs (Hume + Brentano).

* Many stress that:

- emotions are “intentionally” directed towards objects in world
- are ways of being conscious or aware of the world.
- give meaning to other components of emotion.
- paint a uniquely rational picture of emotion.

* Began with British moral sentiment theories (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume) Applied to aesthetic enjoyment and moral approval.

Problems:

- Distinction between these and other “irrational” emotions
- Feelings often in conflict with values.

* European theorists: Brentano: General evaluative theory: pro/ con attitudes
Assessments may be wrong (“blind” vs. “evident” emotions)
Scheler: evaluative (intentional) vs. non-evaluative (reactive) emotions
Sartre: emotions fill world with value in problematic situations

(5) Cognitive Theories:

* Focus on connections between emotions, our perceptions and beliefs about the world, ourselves and others: Emotions are cognitions.

* Many other theorists have a cognitive component in work (e.g. evaluative)

* Logical and linguistic connection between cognitions and emotion.

* Clear analysis of rationality of emotions possible.

- * Questions about how cognition related to emotion.

Ten Problems in the Analysis of Emotion:

(1) What Counts as an Emotion:

- * Sudden, explosive emotions vs. long-term, calmer states of mind (e.g. conjugal love)
- * Moods without obvious object (e.g. anxiety)
- * “Episodes vs. dispositions”
- * Are emotions homogeneous phenomena, or do certain theories explain certain emotions better?

(2) Which Emotions are Basic?

- * There are innumerable lists of “basic” emotions which combine to make more sophisticated ones
- * Few agree on these lists
- * Are they innate or do they vary by culture?

(3) What are Emotions About?

- * Intentionality/ formal object of emotion: need it exist? (“Intentional inexistence”);
- * Linking the intentionality of emotion and the forms of language used to describe it (“intensionality”)
- * Different emotions about different aspects of an object.

(4) Explaining Emotions:

* Causal explanations vs. explanations from viewpoint of the subject: different implications/ difficultly integrating.

* Explanations in terms of subject's motivation.

(5) The Rationality of Emotions:

* If cognitive, involving beliefs, can be tested for accuracy

* May be mistaken, but may provide additional insight.

* Neither rational nor irrational, but exhibit elements of each.

(6) Emotions and Ethics:

* Debate as to whether rationality or emotion = foundation of ethics.

* Philosophers at both extremes neglect those aspects of emotion that are themselves rational.

* American/UK "emotivists" have argued that ethical claims are based on "nothing but" emotion.

* Nevertheless, connection between emotions and ethics close (e.g. re: values).

* We cannot satisfactorily answer ethical questions without clarifying the role of emotion

(7) Emotions and Culture:

* If they involve beliefs, emotions may be learned in a particular culture

* How much variations are innate, reflect differences in expression or different circumstances?

(8) Emotions and Expression:

- * Is emotion, and its expression nothing more than behavior? (renders expression problematic)
- * Logical link between emotions and expression put in doubt by people in different circumstances expressing their emotions differently
- * In what sense does gesture express emotion? What if repressed?

(9) Emotions and Responsibility:

- * Do emotions happen to us, or are they something we do?
- * If the former, mitigate responsibility; if the latter, do not.
- * Questions of emotion management/ability to change one's emotions.
- * Insofar as emotions involve beliefs we are responsible for, we are responsible.
- * Needs further investigation.

(10) Emotions and Knowledge:

- * Improved knowledge of ourselves/false beliefs underlying emotions = first step in changing them.
- * Beliefs not always readily apparent/ easy to change (e.g. clinical psychology/ unconscious)
- * Also important to recognize that emotions a way to gain knowledge, discover meaning and self-understanding.
- * Rethinking emotion in this manner illustrates importance of studying the emotions.