In Defense of Cognitivism about the Emotions

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Cognitivism in the philosophy of emotion – the view that emotions are identical to (a subset of) evaluative judgments – has largely been abandoned in response to a raft of objections.¹ We think this abandonment is premature, and rests largely in the failure of cognitivists to present their position as part of a larger framework of the mental. Here we defend a cognitivist and functionalist account of the emotions. It is cognitivist in that it identifies emotions with evaluative representations, and it is functionalist in that it claims that which evaluative representations are emotions depends upon the causal relations those representations bear to other mental states and behavior.

We begin with an articulation of cognitivism and then proceed to enumerate the objections it has faced.² Most of these objections have to do with the relations between

¹ For the beginnings of the rise of cognitivism in the last century, see Kenny (1963) and Solomon (1973, 1976). For more recent defenses, see Neu (2000) and Nussbaum (2001). Identifying the cognitivist camp with the claim that emotions are evaluative judgments is not uncontroversial. It is Solomon’s term in (1980) and he continued to use it in his (2004), though in the latter he seems to endorse a hybrid or compound account of the emotions rather than a purely cognitivist one. Neu (1977) employs the term ‘thought’, Roberts (1988) talks of “construals,” and Calhoun (1984) “seeing as.”

emotions, on the one hand, and sensations and physiological changes, on the other; anti-cognitivists have claimed these latter are essential constituents of emotion. The functionalist account we subsequently develop avoids these objections. We then turn to an objection that has been very influential, viz. that cognitivists cannot account for the emotions of young humans and non-human animals because we cannot ascribe to such creatures the conceptually constituted propositional attitudes cognitivists claim are constitutive of emotion.\(^3\) In response to this, we argue that a cognitivist ought to claim that some emotions have propositional but nonconceptual content, and so can be had by infants and animals.\(^4\) We conclude that there has yet to be a decisive objection to cognitivism.

I. Physiological Changes and the Phenomenological Character of Emotion

According to cognitivism, emotions are mental states that are wholly constituted by an agent’s bearing a particular relation to a proposition, where the constituents of

\(^3\) Deigh (2004).

\(^4\) See Evans’s (1982) or the book that began the contemporary debate on nonconceptual content, and for friendly discussions and overviews of the debate see Tye (1995, 1997), Heck (2000) and Speaks (2005). For arguments against the view that mental states have nonconceptual content see McDowell (1994). Philosophers of emotion are seemingly unaware of this possibility. In fact, some cognitivists – e.g. Solomon (2004) – suggests that emotions have conceptual but not propositional content, though it is never explained how this could be.
those propositions are at least partly evaluative, e.g. that the bear is nearby and dangerous, that one’s friend has snitched and thereby slighted one. Emotions have intentional/representational content, then, by having propositions as their contents; emotions are about whatever their propositional contents are about. There is some disagreement among cognitivists as to which relations one bears to the evaluative proposition such that it can be said one has an emotion. Early cognitivists claimed that it must be the believing or judging relation, but this is open to counterexamples. First, there are cases of phobia, in which one continues to fear an object one does not believe or judge to be dangerous; here, one bears the seeming relation to the proposition while withholding one’s assent. In this way, emotions can be akin to perceptual illusions in which one does not assent to the seeming that the stick in the water is bent, though the illusion continues.  

Second, there are cases of fearing in which one is only imagining a scenario, e.g. that one’s child is lying dead in a ditch somewhere. And another is a case of anger in which one suspects, but does not yet believe, that one has been betrayed. But

5 See Stocker and Hegeman (1992). Narrow cognitivists have responded that in cases of phobia one holds contradictory beliefs concerning the dangerousness of the object, and one of those judgments constitutes one’s fear. Like many, we find this response hard to believe; it seems unwarranted to insist that in every case there really is, despite the fact that these people insist that they do not believe the plane or the nonpoisonous bug is dangerous, a belief that the object is dangerous.

6 In his later work, Solomon (2004) explicitly denies that belief is the only (or even a) relation one bears to a proposition such that it constitutes an emotion. See footnote 1,
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all of these cases are ones in which one has an evaluative representation; they are cases in which one has a mental representation as of some object’s having an evaluative, or perhaps more broadly, normative property.\(^7\) So we will use that term to identify the class of attitudes one may bear to a proposition with evaluative content such that one has an emotion; believing, judging, imagining, seeming, suspecting, and so on are all kinds of evaluative representations. And a necessary condition for being a cognitivist, as we understand it, is that all emotions are evaluative representations.

The first objection to cognitivism presents itself immediately. There are cases in which one has an evaluative representation but one does not have an emotion. Paul Griffiths points to a bored worker in charge of quality control who makes thousands of evaluative judgments a day but does so without emotion.\(^8\) And Griffiths is right about this. But just because a cognitivist thinks all emotions are evaluative representations, he need not think all evaluative representations are emotions. So the cognitivist needs to explain the difference here; what makes it the case that some evaluative representations are emotions and others are not? Following Griffiths, we may call this the unemotional evaluations objection; we will return to this objection after presenting our functionalist account.

The second objection to cognitivism, the physiological objection, is that it leaves above, for other ways cognitivists have tried to capture the relevant relation.

\(^7\) We use the familiar ‘as of’ locution to indicate that the representation may be a misrepresentation.

\(^8\) Griffiths (1997), 29.
out that part of the emotions that psychologists and biologists study. Griffiths puts it as follows.

The propositional attitude school [cognitivism] neglects the physiological aspects of emotion. Emotional responses are characterized by at least four classes of physiological changes: facial expressions, musculoskeletal changes such as flinching, expressive vocal changes, and autonomic nervous system changes such as adrenaline release and change of heart rate.\(^9\)

We think the physiological objection is a very weak one. Suppose Mary sees a bear in the wilderness, rightly judges it is dangerous, and has the sensations of sweat running down her neck and of her heart beating powerfully. But, curiously, she does not actually undergo the physiological changes; there is no sweat and her heart continues to beat at a steady pace. Though Mary is not undergoing physiological changes associated with emotion, this looks like a clear case in which she can be truly said to be afraid of the bear (and rightly so). This is atypical, to be sure, but it demonstrates that those changes are not essential constituents of an emotion.

\(^9\) Griffiths (1997), 29-30. Griffiths provides empirical evidence for these claims in chapters three and four. D’Arms and Jacobson (2003) stress the importance of physiological changes as well, especially for the emotions of human infants and non-human animals.
Our intuitions on the case are not the only supports we have for the view that Mary is, in fact, having an emotion. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio demonstrates that emotional experiences can be had without the typical physiological changes of the body; he calls this the “as-if loop”. So we think this argument is decisive. But even if it is not, the functionalist account we will offer can easily accommodate the view that physiological changes are deeply connected to emotions.

The third objection, which is perhaps the most familiar, we may call the phenomenological objection: it is that cognitivism misses the fact that emotions have a phenomenological character; there is something it is like to have an emotion. It is typically thought that cognitivists must deny that sensations are relevant to the identity of an emotion. Martha Nussbaum, for example, claims there are cases in which people undergo an emotion even though there are no sensations present. We think Nussbaum’s

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10 Damasio (1994).

11 It is worth noting that philosophers of emotion have typically misunderstood the sensations characteristic of emotion. Deigh (1994, p. 826) says that “bodily sensations…are not directed at or toward anyone or anything” Peter Goldie (2000, p. 20) claims that “[e]motions are not brute feelings like toothache, which we cannot make sense of; all we can do is give toothaches a causal explanation”. But in the literature on the philosophy of mind that view of sensations has rightly undergone quite a bit of criticism. See, for example, Tye (1995, 1997), a representationalist about consciousness, who thinks that sensations are wholly representational mental states.

examples are question-begging, though, and that this is the wrong move to make anyway. It is part of both our common sense notion of emotion and our scientific investigations of emotion that there is a tight connection between emotions and sensations. Nussbaum’s denial of this might satisfy those already in the cognitivist camp, but anyone not particularly friendly to cognitivism from the start will count the fact that a cognitivist position denies this aspect of emotion as a major strike against it. So we want to endorse a non-orthodox conception of cognitivism according to which sensations are part of the picture. But how they are part of the picture is important. They might be constituents of the emotion, which is not a cognitivist-friendly option, or they may be necessary consequences of emotion, which is perfectly compatible with cognitivism.

In fact, there are two (incompatible) ways of making phenomenology a part of the picture. The first consists in claiming that at least some judgments have a non-sensory phenomenological character. This is, roughly, what Patricia Greenspan, Michael Stocker, and Peter Goldie claim.\(^\text{13}\) We prefer a significantly less controversial response, and concede to anti-cognitivists both that sensations are necessarily tied to emotion and that these sensations are those associated with the physiological changes Griffiths enumerates. We think that mental states that are evaluative representations only count as emotions on

the condition that they cause the sensations that are characteristic of emotions. In fact, if our claim that physiological changes can be absent while an emotion is present is false (if the case of Mary, above, along with Damasio’s “as-if loop”, fails to persuade), one can also say that an emotion is an evaluative representation that counts as an emotion only if it causes sensations and physiological changes. This is, in outline, our functionalist account of the emotions.

It might be thought that this concession to anti-cognitivists is capitulation, but it is not. It is the result of recognizing that identifying a mental state as an emotion requires that it has the extrinsic property of causing various sensations (and perhaps physiological changes). But that a mental state should be identifiable by reference to its extrinsic properties is, of course, neither a new nor threatening claim concerning the identity of a mental state. Functionalism about the mind is, after all, a view according to which a mental state is identified by virtue of its extrinsic properties; what sorts of things cause it and what sorts of things it causes. The belief that p, for example, is whatever stands in the appropriate place in a causal network of mental states and behaviors, but the belief is either the thing playing that causal role (as we believe) or the role being played. Similarly, cognitivists, in identifying emotions with a mental state that is an evaluative representation that is causally related to the production of various behaviors and sensations, are not giving up its core thesis, but are offering an account of the emotions that is in line with the dominant account of the mind on offer. To be a mental state that is an emotion is to be that thing that stands in a certain place in a causal network to other mental states and behaviors, and most notable in the immediate causal vicinity are
sensations (and physiological changes). But the thing playing that role is the emotion, and that thing just is an evaluative representation.\(^1^4\)

Note that this account not only handily deals with the phenomenological and physiological objections, but also with the unemotional evaluations objection. For the bored quality control worker has evaluative representations that do not cause sensations; on our view, these evaluative representations fail to meet a necessary condition for being emotions, which is just the result we want.

An anti-cognitivist might complain that this causal connection is too contingent; we must think sensations are *constituents* of emotion. But there are two things we may say in response. The first is to note that our cognitivist account can readily account for the tight causal connection between the evaluative representations she identifies as emotions and the physiological changes and sensations philosophers like Griffiths are intent on making central to an account of the emotions: having mental states with evaluative content being causally connected with those changes and sensations proved useful for survival of the organisms that had such connections (or the species of which the organism is a member). The empirical research done on the emotions, then, is not, as Griffiths suggests, an embarrassment for cognitivists.

There is a further advantage to our view that starts as an objection to the kind of

\(^{14}\) Another option here is to abandon cognitivism and endorse an account of the emotions according to which emotions are wholes made of parts, or put differently according to which an emotion is a mental state that supervenes on a compound of other (mental) states. We discuss this view in [reference deleted for blind review].
view anti-cognitivists like Griffiths suggest. We often say that someone has been angry at someone for years, or has felt guilty about that all his life, or loved her since the day he saw her, but how can a view that claims emotions require physiological changes account for such a thing? The physiological changes people like Griffiths enumerate can last mere seconds while emotions can last years – even a lifetime. Physiological changes, then, seem inessential to such emotions. Similarly, we regularly cite a person’s subconscious emotions to explain his behavior; he is not even aware that those emotions are having the force on him that they are. But then it looks like such emotions are going along undetected; how can that be if we identify emotions with a set of physiological changes and sensations that make themselves quite evident to the person undergoing them?

Our functionalist proposal deals with these cases nicely. Someone may believe that p even though he is not thinking about p at the moment; we believe literally thousands of things, though we certainly do not have all of them present before our minds at once, and some of them never come before our mind’s eye at all. If emotions just are evaluative representations, where that includes believing something has an evaluative property, then we readily see how it can be said of someone that he has had that emotion for years, or his whole life, or whatever. Further, just as a belief that Napoleon lost in Russia causes, in conjunction with other mental states, a desire to raise one hand when asked who in the room knows where Napoleon lost, what makes these beliefs emotions is

\[15\] This is a feature of emotions many cognitivists have drawn attention to, e.g. Solomon (2004).
that, in conjunction with other mental states (e.g. one’s seeing one’s longstanding enemy, long-ago victim, or life-long love enter the room), they cause one to have certain sensations and physiological sensations. Subconscious emotions, we take it, work in the same way, though the conditions under which the evaluative representation elicit physiological changes and sensations might be harder to come by, e.g. the probing questions of a therapist.

A functionalist account of cognitivism readily deals with the objections raised thus far. But there is another objection to cognitivism that a functionalist, as such, cannot answer. In the next section we explore that objection and offer a response that does not fall out of our functionalist conception of emotion but is nonetheless perfectly functionalist-friendly.

II. Nonconceptual Content and the Emotions of Beasts and Babies

In a widely-cited article, John Deigh claims there is a set of emotions – the basic or natural emotions – to which non-human animals and human infants are susceptible, and thus, according to cognitivism, they must be capable of having the propositional attitudes that are constitutive of those emotions.\footnote{Deigh (1994).} But they cannot have those propositional attitudes, Deigh claims, and that is because having those attitudes requires a linguistic skill they either will never have (in the case of beasts) or have not yet acquired (in the case of babies), viz. the ability to grasp and deploy concepts. Deigh concludes that cognitivism cannot be an adequate account of the emotions. He repeats his objection
in a more recent article.

But propositional thought presupposes linguistic capacities, which are unique to human beings and, in fact, human beings who have grown past infancy. Consequently, if one represents the thought content of every intentional state as a proposition, one cannot account for primitive [or basic] emotions.\(^\text{17}\)

So cognitivist theories of emotion must give up taking the thoughts emotions contain as in every case a proposition. They must find a way to explain some of those thoughts as nonpropositional so as to avoid making the possession of linguistic capacities a condition of being liable to emotions.\(^\text{18}\)

Quite a few other influential philosophers in the philosophy of emotion, Justin D’Arms, Daniel Jacobson, Paul Griffiths, and Jesse Prinz register this complaint as well. The problem with any form of cognitivism, D’Arms and Jacobson claim, is that it “seems incompatible with attributing them [emotions] to animals and infants, who lack the requisite concepts,”\(^\text{19}\) and Paul Griffiths approvingly cites Deigh’s (1994) during his

\(^\text{17}\) Deigh (2004), 10.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid, 11.

\(^\text{19}\) D’Arms and Jacobson (2003), 133.
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effort to undermine cognitivism (or what he calls the “propositional attitude theory”).

Jesse Prinz, in characterizing cognitivism, offers the following.

If emotions are constituted, at least in part, by propositional attitudes, then having an emotion requires possession of the concepts that would be used to ascribe those propositional attitudes…Thus, defenders of cognitive theories make an implicit commitment to the claim that emotions require concepts.

Later, after arguing that having emotions does not require concepts, Prinz says, “Emotions are unlikely to have the complex structure that cognitive theorists presume that they have. They do not decompose into meaningful, propositionally structured parts. They are not propositional attitudes.”

Deigh, D’Arms, Jacobson, and Griffiths do not deny that propositions (partly) constitute some set of emotions. Deigh points out that moral emotions, like guilt and resentment, are prime targets for a cognitivist proposal, since they are had by adult humans and not by beasts and babies. This is explained by the fact that these emotions are acquired once the evaluative concepts that partially constitute the proposition that is the content of these emotions are acquired: ‘wrong’, in the case of guilt, ‘betrayal’, in the

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20 Griffiths (1997).

21 Prinz (2004), 23.

22 Ibid, 50.
case of resentment, and so on. Similarly, D’Arms and Jacobson think the cognitivist account fits emotions that are “cognitively sharpened.”

[M]ost (human) emotional episodes can be described as, in some sense, essentially involving belief. Once cannot be angry that one was denied tenure, for instance, without believing that one was denied tenure…Someone could take all the episodes of anger-that-one-was-denied-tenure together and treat them as a type of anger. This might be called…‘tenure rage’…Tenure rage is what we will call a cognitive sharpening of anger. These are types constructed by specifying a subclass of instances of an emotion, or other affective state, in terms of some thought that they happen to share.  

Thus a division is claimed between two kinds of emotion, the basic or natural and the non-basic, the former of which lack propositional content, the latter of which have it.

But all of these philosophers make a critical slide from ‘propositional attitude’ to ‘attitude with conceptual content’, and there are two responses to the objection, one broad and the other narrow. The broad objection is simply that it is far from obvious that the correct analysis of propositions consists in the claim that they have concepts as their elements. That beasts and babies lack concepts would thus be irrelevant, since there is no reason for thinking one must have concepts to bear a relation to something without

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23 Ibid, 137.
concepts as its constituents.\footnote{There is a more direct way of responding to the beasts and babies objection. We may simply ask whether all mental states have conceptual content and not worry whether they also have propositional content; since those who advance the beasts and babies objection are concerned with conceptual content anyway, we may leave aside talk of propositional content and leave open the possibility of there being nonconceptual contents that are not propositions. But since the objection has been put in terms of propositional content, we are following suit.}

There is much to say about the nature of propositions that is well beyond the scope of this paper but a few comments are helpful. Fregeans about propositions think propositions are structured sets of concepts, or n-tuples of concepts, while neo-Russelians take propositions to be structured n-tuples of objects, relations, and properties. So Fregeans assert, and neo-Russelians deny, that propositions are structures with concepts as their constituents.\footnote{There are other non-Fregean analyses of propositions, e.g. possible worlds semantics analyzes propositions as sets of possible worlds. See Stalnaker (1998).} Those who advance the beasts and babies objection simply assume that cognitivists must endorse a Fregean analysis of propositions, but there is no reason for thinking that cognitivism about the emotions entails Fregeanism about propositions, and that is true even if, historically, all cognitivists have been Fregeans.\footnote{Deigh (1994) explicitly attributes Fregeanism to cognitivists.} Thus, if it turns out that, for example, a Russelian account of propositions is the right one, all mental states, and \textit{a fortiori} all emotions, have nonconceptual content, and the beasts and babies objection simply assume that cognitivists must endorse a Fregean analysis of propositions, but there is no reason for thinking that cognitivism about the emotions entails Fregeanism about propositions, and that is true even if, historically, all cognitivists have been Fregeans.\footnote{Deigh (1994) explicitly attributes Fregeanism to cognitivists.}
objection is rendered irrelevant. The success of this broad response to the objection hangs on the success of a non-Fregean analysis of propositions, of course, but what is important here is that the force of the beasts and babies objection rises and falls with the success of a theory of propositions, an issue about which most philosophers of emotion are silent.

The narrow response to the objection is more pressing. Rather than claiming that all propositions and hence all propositional attitudes deserve a non-Fregean analysis, the narrow response claims that at least some mental states have propositional but nonconceptual content. We think, for example, that at least perceptual states can have nonconceptual content. And this is important because a cognitivist may respond as follows to the beasts and babies objection: just as we ought to allow that an emotion can be constituted by bearing the seeming, imagining, and suspecting relation to a proposition, we also ought to allow that the perceiving relation suffices as well, where the contents of those perceptions may be nonconceptual. If that is true, then the emotions of beasts and babies can be said to be identical to perceptions with propositional, evaluative, nonconceptual content.

We think this is the right view, and though we cannot argue for the actuality of nonconceptual content here, we will summarize what we take to be some of the more persuasive arguments in favor of it. We will then consider an objection to our position.

27 In fact, we think infants and non-human animals can have beliefs with nonconceptual content, but because our position does not depend upon that crucial premise, we put it to the side.
One claim that the discussion of nonconceptual content revolves around is that perceptual states can have nonconceptual content. There are a number of arguments for this claim, but the most influential and readily understandable contains as one of its premises that the contents of our perceptual representations are more fine-grained than our conceptual representations. The argument goes like this: in looking at a color wheel that contains thirty shades of red, one has a perceptual experience with representational content, where the content represents each of the thirty shades of red. But one does not have a concept corresponding to each of those shades of red – red$_1$, red$_2$, red$_3$, and so on up to and including red$_{30}$. Thus the representational content must be (at least partially) nonconceptual.  

Another argument has to do with the (alleged) fact that perceptual representations can have contradictory content, and that this is only possible if the content is nonconceptual. Tim Crane claims that perceptual representations with contradictory content occur in some cases of illusion; he cites the “waterfall illusion,” in which, after looking at a moving image for a while, one looks at a still image and has a perceptual representation of that object in the still image as both moving and not moving.  

Another reason for thinking that perceptual representations can be nonconceptual (indeed, must be, as this line of thought goes) is that we must account for the perceptual representations of nonhuman animals and infants. Christopher Peacocke (who is

\[28\] This argument is first offered, or at least suggested, in the book that began the contemporary debate: Evans’s (1982). Also see Heck (2000).

\[29\] Crane (1988).
unconvinced by the fineness of grain argument) offers the following.

In my view the most fundamental reason - the one on which other reasons must rely if the conceptualist presses hard - lies in the need to describe correctly the overlap between human perception and that of some of the nonlinguistic animals. While being reluctant to attribute concepts to the lower animals, many of us would also want to insist that the property of (say) representing a flat brown surface as being at a certain distance from one can be common to the perceptions of humans and of lower animals. The overlap of content is not just a matter of analogy, of mere quasi-subjectivity in the animal case. It is literally the same representational property that the two experiences possess, even if the human experience also has richer representational contents in addition. If the lower animals do not have states with conceptual content, but some of their perceptual states have contents in common with human perceptions, it follows that some perceptual representational content is nonconceptual.\footnote{Peacocke (2001b), 613-614.}

There are other arguments in favor of the claim that perceptual representations have nonconceptual but propositional and (thereby) representational content, but this suffices for our purposes.

Let us return to the beasts and babies objection. In brief, the objection is that
cognitivists take emotions to have propositional content, that propositions are constituted by (structured sets of) concepts, that only a creature with a language can grasp concepts and so propositions, and since some nonlinguistic creatures have emotions, their emotions must not have propositional content. Lastly, since the cognitivist understands emotions as a relation to a proposition, cognitivists cannot account for the emotions of beasts and babies. We saw one (non-decisive) objection to this line of reasoning: the best account of propositions may not be a Fregean one. But there is another response available – one less far-reaching than offering a non-Fregean account of all propositions: the mental states that are the emotions of nonhuman animals and infants are propositional and (thereby) representational, where the contents are nonconceptual.\textsuperscript{31} If this is right, then the proposition critics’ claim that the emotions of beasts and babies are nonpropositional is unjustified; again, they may be propositional (and representational) but nonconceptual.

It is worth noting that the claim that perceptual representations can have nonconceptual content is certainly compatible with thinking that they can also have conceptual content. An adult human being frequently has perceptual representations that are at least in part conceptual. Beasts and babies, on the other hand, only ever have perceptual representations with nonconceptual content. The distinction between basic and non-basic emotions, then, is grounded in the distinction between the conceptual and

\textsuperscript{31} There is a complication here concerning whether we ought to think it is the state itself that is nonconceptual or the contents that are nonconceptual, though that distinction does not bear on this point. See Speaks (2005).
the nonconceptual, not the propositional and nonpropositional.

There is an objection to the view we are offering, viz. that perceptual representations cannot have evaluative content. Put differently, we can literally see that something is round or red or ten feet away, but we cannot literally see the dangerousness of the charging bear; that cannot be part of the content of a perceptual state. To have a representation as of something’s being dangerous requires having the concept ‘danger’ and applying it. If this is right then our response to the beasts and babies objection flounders.

But there are at least two very strong reasons for denying this line of reasoning. Deigh inadvertently suggests the first.

One feels fear at what is scary, horror at what is gruesome, and disgust at what is foul. These properties characterize the way things look, sound, taste, and smell. A scary mask, for instance, has certain exaggerated features that are designed to alarm or frighten, a scary voice has a certain unusual cadence and pitch.

Later, Deigh reiterates this view of things.

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32 We use the familiar ‘as of’ locution to indicate that the perception may be a misperception.

33 Deigh (1994), 842.
What is going on in a dog’s mind when he growls at someone? Suppose, for example, you need to enter your neighbors’ yard, but just as you approach the gate, their dog growls at you. What excites the dog’s growling is his perception of you as you are about to encroach on his territory. He senses something invasive about your behavior that he would not sense in someone he knows and has affection for. Your appearance in his perceptual field triggers this sensitivity, and as long as the condition lasts so does the growling.\textsuperscript{34}

Deigh thinks, rightly, that perceptual representations can be evaluative, for terms like ‘scary’, ‘invasive’, and ‘foul’ are evaluative terms. To have a representation as of something’s being foul is to have, as we commonly put it, a representation as of something’s gone bad; it is precisely because the representation is negative in this way that creatures withdraw from what is perceived to be foul. Similarly, the dog has a representation as of the invasiveness of the visitor, though he does not have the concept ‘invasive’.

Deigh does add that he thinks something’s being scary is distinct from its being dangerous: “The scary differs from the dangerous in being at least sometimes a true or direct property of the way something looks and sounds. Something that looks dangerous is something one can infer is dangerous from the way it looks, whereas one need make no

\textsuperscript{34} Deigh (2004), 20.
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But first, this does not imply that the scary is not evaluative; it only implies that an ability to represent the evaluative property nonconceptually in perceptual representations does not presuppose an ability to infer, and second, it is difficult to see what it could be to be scary if it is not simply seeming to be dangerous. We cannot see how one might claim that something is scary but does not seem at all dangerous. If that is right, and we allow that perceptual representations are seemings (as we surely should), then we may allow that a perceptual representation of the scary just is a seeming of the dangerous.

The second, and to our mind, most powerful reason for thinking that perceptual representations can have nonconceptual evaluative content comes from considering the work of Joseph LeDoux. LeDoux demonstrated that fear can be the result of the activation of two neural pathways. One runs like this: there is a stimulus presented to the subject, information about the content of the perceptual experience is relayed to the prefrontal cortex (a sophisticated part of the brain that is responsible for things like conceptual understanding), which, as it were, recognizes that this object falls under the extension of ‘dangerous’. That information gets relayed to the amygdale, which is responsible for various physiological changes, including those that match the physiological profile of fear as determined by neuroscientists: the release of adrenaline, widening of the eyes, and so on. That kind of process, roughly, is what goes on when one hears that the stock market has just plunged and one’s savings are gone. But there is a

35 Deigh (1994), 842.

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different, significantly less sophisticated process that results in the physiological profile of fear: information from the perceptual system goes directly to the amygdale, which enacts the aforementioned physiological changes. The prefrontal cortex – the part responsible for conceptual understanding – gets no say in the matter, at least not initially; the creature just has the physiological changes characteristic of fear before it gets to have any nonperceptual representations of it. And this strongly suggests that the creature’s perceptual representation includes a representation of the object of its sight as dangerous, where that representation is, of course, nonconceptual. That it is nonconceptual is evidenced by its skipping the part of the brain responsible for conceptual representations. That it is evaluative is evidenced by its causing the “affect program” for fear and not, say, joy, sadness, or anger. In fact, it looks like the best, if not the only, explanation for that affect program being activated rather than another is that included in the perceptual representation is a representation as of the object’s being dangerous.

So we have two reasons for thinking that evaluative properties can be represented nonconceptually in perceptual representations, and so the objection to our position flounders.

Conclusion. On our view, emotions are evaluative representations that are causally related to sensations and possibly physiological changes; the latter are not constituents of emotion, even though they play a crucial role in identifying which evaluative representations are emotions and which are not. Further, these evaluative representations have propositional content, where that content is nonconceptual in the case of basic
emotions. We have attempted to demonstrate that this account avoids the unemotional evaluation objection, the physiological objection, the phenomenological objection, and the beasts and babies objection. Since these are by far the most widespread objections, and the source of so many people denying cognitivism, we conclude that there has yet to be a persuasive objection to cognitivism and that it has been prematurely abandoned. In fact, we argued that there are some aspects of the emotions – their enduring over great stretches of time and being subconscious – that some opponents to cognitivism have a tough time dealing with while cognitivism does not.

Bibliography


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