

“Blenderism” versus “Componentialism” About Emotion Structure Larry A. Herzberg

1. Introduction

Emotion ascriptions typically have two grammatically independent parts. For instance, if I say that I am (i) *glad that my computer is working*, ‘glad’ and ‘my computer is working’ are detachable in the sense that I may later report that I am (ii) *sad that my computer is working*, or (iii) *glad that it is not raining*. Furthermore, ‘glad’ seems to have the same meaning in (i) and (iii), and ‘my computer is working’ seems to have the same meaning in (i) and (ii). The debate that I discuss below concerns whether such linguistic platitudes reflect psychological facts about emotion structure.¹ “Componentialists”, as I call them, hold that they do. “Blenderists”, on the contrary, insist that such ascriptions misleadingly suggest an overly simplistic view of emotional intentionality. In this paper I examine a couple of Peter Goldie’s strongest blenderist arguments, and find them unconvincing.²

First, however, I should clarify the sort of componentialism to which blenderists are reacting, a paradigm that arguably traces back to Aristotle (Cf. *Rhetoric*, Book II), continues through the writings of David Hume (1739/1975), and shows up most recently in works by R. S. Lazarus (1991, 1999), Jesse Prinz (2004), and Antonio Damasio (1994, 2004), among many others. Roughly speaking, componentialists hold that the states to which such emotion ascriptions refer have, like the ascriptions themselves, at least two dissociable parts.³ The first is essentially *affective* – felt and/or motivational – and perhaps also represents either somatic states or significant organism-environment relations.⁴ The second component represents the property,

¹ ‘Structure’, as I am using it here, is a term that cuts across logical and ontological categories.

² For other interesting – but, I would argue, similarly unsuccessful – blenderist arguments, see Gunther (2003) and Ratcliffe (2005).

³ By ‘dissociable’ I simply mean that they could exist independently of each other.

⁴ Damasio suggests that this component represents somatic states, while Prinz argues that it represents the

object, person, event, or situation at which the affective aspect is “directed”. For simplicity’s sake, I call this second component the emotion’s *object-identifying* aspect, and refer to it as having “object-identifying content”. Most componentialists assume that the relationship between these two aspects is first *causal* (the object-identifying aspect triggering the affective aspect), and then *associative* in a particular way, the affective aspect normally becoming “directed towards” that which is represented by the object-identifying aspect.

Damasio’s psychological view of *feeling an emotion* (which he distinguishes from his purely neurophysiological view of emotion *per se*) provides a particularly clear example of componentialism-

Feeling [an emotion] consists of the *joint perception* of (a) the causative object; (b) the ensuing *emotional state*, and (c) the cognitive mode and related thoughts that may follow. Thus the intentionality of the emotions – the sense of what they are about – arises early in this physiological cycle with the perceptual definition of the emotionally-competent stimulus, and is completed in the feeling stage whose unfolding remains pointed to the emotionally-competent stimulus. ...feelings are, no doubt, about the causative external objects; but feelings are, in and of themselves, largely constituted by perceptions of bodily changes. (2004, pp. 5-6)

This passage leaves open the possibility of interpreting the “joint perception” that constitutes an emotional feeling as a blend, but in an earlier work Damasio explicitly argues against this hypothesis, first by describing the relationship between the two perceptions as a sort of *juxtaposition* (1994, p. 145), and then by presenting two quick componentialist arguments, one neurological, the other having to do with explanatory utility-

I chose this term [‘juxtaposition’] because I think the image of the body proper appears *after* the image of the “something else” has been formed and held active, and because the two images remain separate, neurally... In other words, there is a “combination” rather than a “blending.” It might be appropriate to use the term *superposition* for what seems to happen to the images of the body proper and “something else” in our integrated experience.

The idea that the “qualified” (a face) and the “qualifier” (the juxtaposed body state) are combined but not blended helps explain why it is possible to feel depressed even as one thinks about people or situations that in no way signify sadness or loss... Neurobiologically speaking, the unexplainable qualifiers affirm the relative autonomy of the neural machinery behind the emotions... (p. 146)

sort of organism-environment relation summarized by Lazarus’s “core relational themes”. As far as I can tell, Lazarus himself places little or no weight on an emotional sensation’s representational properties, instead locating all of an emotion’s representation in its cognitive-evaluative component.

How might neurologically *juxtaposed* and psychologically dissociable images come to seem *superposed* in “integrated experience”? The analogy is only very rough, but consider what occurs when one transparent slide is set over another in a projector: the images are literally blended together on the screen. However, the images remain dissociable, since the slides are themselves separable. If this analogy is apt (aside from “Cartesian theater” concerns), it nicely illustrates the danger of drawing psychological conclusions from phenomenological premises.

In any case, on such componentialist views ascriptions (i) and (iii) can refer to emotion occurrences with the same type of affective aspect, and (i) and (ii) can refer to emotion occurrences with the same object-identifying aspects. Furthermore, on such views there is no reason why those object-identifying aspects cannot employ the very same percepts or concepts – and hence have the same representational content – as those that would produce the self-ascription of a non-emotional belief or judgment (e.g., that my computer is working). Hence, componentialism coheres well with the apparent logical structure of such emotion ascriptions. It can also relatively easily explain phenomena such as emotional displacement (in which affect triggered by one representation’s content is re-directed at another’s) and “affective inertia” (in which an emotion’s affective aspect outlasts its object-identifying aspect).⁵

By contrast, blenderists argue that an emotion’s affective and object-identifying aspects are *indissociable*. On their views, an emotion’s affective aspect *blends* with its object-identifying aspect, instantiating a unique class of “affect-infused” concepts or percepts, and so constituting a state whose representational content cannot be identical to any non-emotional state’s. Goldie (2000, 2002) tries to support such a view with both phenomenological claims about the way it seems to be in an emotional state (or to engage in an activity *emotionally*), and a conceptual

⁵ See De Sousa (1987) for more on the notion of “affective inertia”.

argument similar to Frank Jackson's (1986) "black-and-white-Mary" thought experiment. Just as Mary supposedly gains a new "phenomenal way of thinking" of *red* upon leaving her black-and-white room and seeing a red object for the first time, Goldie argues that ice-scientist Irene gains a new, affect-infused concept of *ice's dangerousness* once she has slipped and fallen on ice. And if a term like 'dangerous' can be ambiguous between an affect-neutral and an affect-infused concept of danger, this might *explain away* the apparent similarities in emotion ascriptions like (i) and (ii). For if the contents of an affect-infused and affect-neutral concept necessarily differ, then one might well conclude that the gladness-infused concepts representing *my computer's working* must differ from any sadness-infused concepts representing the same situation. On Goldie's view, then, (i)-(iii) refer to states having significantly less in common with each other than their ascriptions suggest. But is he right?

2. Goldie's adverbial, phenomenological, and epistemic arguments

Our concern here is with what Goldie takes to be at the core of an "emotional episode", namely a *feeling towards*, which he initially describes as "thinking of with feeling, so that your emotional feelings are directed towards the object of your thought." (p. 19) Since 'with' can indicate almost any kind of association, componentialists can accept this description. Indeed, defining the core of an occurrent emotion as 'thinking of *with* feeling' is broad enough to be accepted by even the most extreme cognitivists about emotion, who view the felt aspects of emotional states as inessential accompaniments of the evaluative, object-identifying cognitive aspects. However, Goldie makes it clear that it is precisely such "add-on" views he is opposing-

Consider doing these things unemotionally: striking a blow; making love; seeking safety. Now consider, and contrast, acting when you act out of emotion: *angrily* striking the blow; making love *passionately*; *fearfully* running away. The phenomenology of such actions – what it is like for the agent – is fundamentally different in character. ... Acting out of emotion is not acting without

emotion (explained by feelingless beliefs and desires) plus some added-on ingredient or ingredients. Rather, when an action is done out of an emotion, the whole action, and the whole experience of the action, is fundamentally different. (2000, p. 40)

Call this *the adverbial argument* against add-on theories, which could also be used against componentialist theories that view emotional feelings as gaining their object-identifying aspects from extrinsically related – and so “added-on” – states like beliefs or sense perceptions.⁶ But how effective is this argument against either sort of theory? Goldie’s point cannot merely be that acting with feeling (or “emotionally”) changes the way the activity seems to the agent and others, for add-on theorists could certainly agree to that. After all, running in darkness seems different than running in light, but not because the running activity *per se* need be different. No, Goldie must be arguing that acting with feeling *essentially alters* the activity. If we accept this, then we might also accept that *mental* activities or processes such as judging and perceiving are essentially altered by being done with feeling. Occurrent emotions might then be viewed as just such altered mental processes, essentially different than cognitive or perceptual processes done without feeling – perhaps because they are just such processes *blended* with feeling, rather than with feelings merely added on.

One problem with this as an argument for blenderism (rather than merely an objection to componentialist theories) is that one could accept that mental activities – distinguished by attitude type – are essentially altered by being done with feeling, but insist that there need be no alteration of the attitude’s object-identifying content. For instance, one could accept that *believing angrily* that John ignored me is an essentially different activity than simply *believing* that John ignored me, and yet not infer from this that the representational content of ‘John

⁶ Goldie (2009) discusses Prinz’s (2004) view (which allows beliefs to play this role, in addition to sense perceptions), but never considers the possibility of accounting for the phenomenology of emotional direction or *feeling towards* in terms of perhaps a *sui generis* sort of association between emotional feelings and extrinsically related representational states.

ignored me’ must be different in the two cases. Indeed, Goldie later recognizes this, admitting that “it is always possible for an opponent to force all the difference into the attitude, so that the debate degenerates into a matter of competing intuitions.” (footnote 3, p. 60) But a more basic problem here is Goldie’s presupposition that, where X is an activity and Y a qualifier, ‘X-ing Y-ly’ must refer to an essentially different activity than simply ‘X-ing’, or even than ‘X-ing Z-ly’, where Y and Z are opposite qualifiers. There are certainly *some* cases in which this presupposition seems true: given some fixed reference frame, ‘running quickly’ perhaps refers to an essentially different activity than merely ‘running’, or at least than ‘running slowly’. But ‘running northerly’ and ‘running’ (or even ‘running southerly’) do not similarly refer to essentially different activities, since they entail no difference in the running *per se*. Here the qualifiers merely signal alterations in the relational contexts of the activity, not in the activity itself. So Goldie needs to argue that locutions like ‘striking angrily’ must be interpreted along the lines of ‘running quickly’ rather than ‘running northerly’, and this he has not done.

Goldie has a more direct phenomenological argument for his view that emotional feelings are “essentially bound up with content – with what the feeling is directed towards” (2000, p. 51). It begins from a case that Michael Stocker (1983) uses to distinguish a mere “intellectual appreciation” of ice’s dangerousness from the way in which one might *feel about* those same dangers after having fallen on ice. Goldie writes-

Putting this example in my terms, then I only thought of the ice as dangerous; now I feel fear towards the ice. ... The difference between thinking of X as Y without feeling and thinking of X as Y with feeling will not just comprise a different attitude towards the same content – thinking which earlier was without feeling and now is with feeling. The difference also lies in the content, although it might be that this difference cannot be captured in words. (p. 60)

Componentialists can certainly agree with Goldie that *what it is like to think of the ice as dangerous* has changed after one has slipped on ice; they need only resist the further conclusion

that this entails changes in the content of the thought, and offer an account of the phenomenological difference in terms of an association between feelings of fear and the thought. They can also agree with Goldie's further point that "it does not follow from the fact that [two] thoughts are expressed in the same words that they have the same content" (Ibid.), for neither does it follow that they do *not* have the same content.

However, despite such difficulties, Goldie returns to the argument two years later (2002, p. 243 ff.), reframing it along the lines of Frank Jackson's (1986) "epistemic argument" against physicalism. He begins by recounting Jackson's central thought experiment. Mary is a scientist who has learned everything there is to know about the physics of color and color perception. However, she has always lived in an entirely black-and-white world. One day she enters a colorful world, and for the first time sees something red. Jackson argues that she has learned something new about color (namely, what it is like to see red), so physicalism is false: knowing all of the *physical* facts does not entail knowing *all* the facts. Goldie, however, is less interested in this conclusion than he is in the premise that Mary has gained a new concept of red. His interpretation of the case (p. 244) boils down to four claims-

(M1) Mary gains a new phenomenal way of thinking about the experience of seeing red.

(M2) Mary's new way of thinking about the experience of seeing red "subsumes" and "transforms" her earlier way of thinking about it.

(M3) In virtue of (M1) and (M2), Mary gains a new *perceptual concept of red* – one that applies immediately to things in the world, and not just to experiences.

(M4) When Mary employs her new perceptual concept of red in a judgment about something in the world (e.g., *That rose is red*), the content of this judgment is essentially different than it would have been had she employed her previous, theoretical concept of red.

The substitution of ‘concept’ in (M3) for the broader ‘way of thinking’ in (M1) and (M2) might raise some concern, as might the inference of a new perceptual concept from a new way of thinking about an experience. But setting those concerns aside for present purposes, (M3) *does* seem to follow from (M1) and (M2), and (M4) follows from (M3) on the relatively uncontroversial assumption that the content of a judgment is determined by the contents of its component concepts. Importantly, an objector could not here “force all the difference into the attitude”, since the attitude of *judgment* remains the same, and the focus is squarely on a presumed change in the judgment’s content.

Goldie next sketches out the analogous case of Irene, “an icy-cool ice-scientist” who knows all of the physical properties and dangers of ice, but who has never before felt fear; she has only an impersonal, theoretical concept of the emotion-

Then, one day, Irene goes out onto the ice, falls, and for the first time feels fear – fear towards the dangerous ice. She now knows, “from the inside”, what it is like to feel fear, so she has gained a new concept – a phenomenal concept. And she has also gained a new perceptual concept, of dangerousness, of which she previously only had theoretical knowledge. When Irene now thinks of ice as dangerous, she can do so in a new way – in a fearful way: she can now think of it *with fear*. ...she now understands in a new way what it is for the ice to be dangerous. Before, when she said “That ice is dangerous”, the thought expressed was a judgment made without feeling; afterwards what she expressed was *feeling towards* the ice. (p. 245)

If we interpret this case along the lines of the four claims Goldie makes about the Mary case, we arrive at the following-

(I1) Irene has gained a new phenomenal concept of the experience of feeling fear.

(I2) Irene’s new phenomenal concept of the experience of feeling fear subsumes and transforms her old concept of it.

(I3) In virtue of (I1) and (I2), Irene gains a new *perceptual concept of dangerousness*.

(I4) When Irene employs her new perceptual concept of dangerousness in a judgment about something in the world (e.g., *That ice is dangerous*), the content of this judgment is

essentially different than it would have been had she employed her previous, theoretical concept of dangerousness.

Now, the analogy between the Irene and Mary cases clearly breaks down at (I3). For, whatever qualms one might have about inferring (M3) from (M1) and (M2), at least in that case the inference was of a new perceptual concept of *red* from a new phenomenal way of thinking about the experience of *red*. But in the Irene case the implicit inference is of a new perceptual concept of *dangerousness* from a new phenomenal concept of the experience of *fear*, and the substitution of dangerousness for fear lacks any clear justification.⁷ It is certainly true that Irene can now think of ice as dangerous in a new, fearful way. That is, she can think of ice as dangerous *with* fear, or even *fearfully* if we keep in mind the two ways of interpreting such adverbial constructions discussed above. But since (I3) does not seem to follow from (I1) and (I2), we have not been given any reason to believe (I4).

It is tempting to suggest here that Goldie should simply substitute ‘fearfulness’ for ‘dangerousness’ in (I3) and (I4). This would certainly strengthen the analogy to Jackson’s case. However, componentialists can agree that when Irene judges “That ice is fearful”, she does so with a new concept of fearfulness, and hence that the judgment’s content has changed from that of her previous judgments expressed in the same words. But they need not further conclude that the content of Irene’s concept of *ice* has changed. For fearfulness, like redness, is arguably a secondary property; an object is fearful only in virtue of its effects on the emotional state of a perceiver or thinker. So when Irene thinks “That ice is fearful” with her new concept of fear (and hence with a new concept of something’s *being fearful*), all that might have changed is her

⁷ There certainly is a *normative* connection between the two concepts: one *should* fear only what is dangerous, and fears might be *rational* only when the subject believes that what she fears is dangerous. But no such normative connection can by itself justify the substitution here, since what *should* be does not entail what *is*.

conception of ice's effects on her, not her conception of ice *per se*.⁸ Finally, returning to the original (I3) and (I4), even if we allow that Irene has a new concept of *dangerousness* entirely in virtue of her new phenomenal concept of *the experience of feeling fear*, perhaps all that is new in her concept of dangerousness relates to *the emotional effects of judging something to be dangerous*. If this is right, then once again we would have no reason to think that her concept of *ice* has changed when she thinks "That ice is dangerous". This is a crucial point, for without the phenomenology of fear "infusing" our concepts of the *objects* that are feared (or our concepts of the objects that are judged to be fearful or dangerous), a blenderist view of emotion structure is not supported.⁹

3. Concluding remarks

While there are other arguments for blenderism I have not had time to discuss here,¹⁰ I would argue that they similarly fail to convincingly rule out componentialist alternatives. Meanwhile, componentialism retains some key advantages. First, its ontology allows us to integrate emotion into our larger theory of mind without unnecessarily multiplying types of representational content. Secondly, it allows us to easily describe and explain common instances of displacement and affective inertia, phenomena that blenderists should have a harder time explaining. Finally, phenomenology *per se* does not support blenderism over componentialism, for even if blenderist intuitions hold regarding experience, Damasio's view of emotional feeling suggests how the experiential "superposition" of affect and object-identifying content might mask a mere "juxtaposition" at a deeper level of explanation.

⁸ Indeed, the same may be true of Mary, who need not have gained a new concept of *rose*.

⁹ The "infusion" metaphor is Goldie's (2002, p. 242).

¹⁰ See footnote 2 above.

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