

The Phenomenology and Science of Emotions: An Introduction

Andreas Elpidorou · Lauren Freeman

Published online: 22 November 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

Phenomenology, perhaps more than any other single movement in philosophy, has been key in bringing emotions to the foreground of philosophical consideration. This is in large part due to the ways in which emotions, according to phenomenological analyses, are revealing of basic structures of human existence. Indeed, it is partly and, according to some phenomenologists, even primarily through our emotions that the world is disclosed to us, that we become present to and make sense of ourselves, and that we relate to and engage with others. A phenomenological study of emotions is thus meant not only to help us to understand ourselves, but also to allow us to see and to make sense of the meaningfulness of our worldly and social existence.

Within the last few decades, the emotions have re-emerged more generally as a topic of great philosophical interest and importance. Philosophers, along with psychologists, cognitive scientists, and neuroscientists have engaged in inter- and intra-disciplinary debates concerning the ontology and phenomenology of emotions, the epistemic and cognitive dimensions of emotions, the rationality of emotions, the role that emotions play in moral judgments, the role that our bodies play in the experience and constitution of emotions, the gendered dimension of emotions (and whether or not there is one and the extent to which it is socially constructed), the temporality of emotions, and the cultural specificity of emotions, to name just a few.

Contemporary phenomenological and scientific considerations of the emotions, however, have treated and continue to treat these questions and issues quite differently. The former takes a first-personal approach to the emotions that is guided by, rooted in, and engaged with our experiences in the world, where the felt quality of emotions provides important insights into the meaningfulness of human experiences. The latter often takes a third-personal or sub-personal approach to the emotions and focuses on their cognitive architecture and neurobiological mechanisms, which can be detached from and unconcerned with the ways that emotions are experienced in and connected to contextual, complex worldly human experiences. Both kinds and levels of analysis are

A. Elpidorou (✉) · L. Freeman
Department of Philosophy, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA
e-mail: andreas.elpidorou@louisville.edu

L. Freeman
e-mail: lauren.freeman@louisville.edu

important for understanding the emotions, but, at the same time, seem to be at odds with one another.

The aim of this special issue is to consider how these different approaches can inform and influence one another in order to both shed light on and broaden contemporary debates about the emotions. This issue is comprised of seven articles and a book symposium by some of the preeminent scholars in the field of emotion. The approaches taken within the pages of the special issue are both phenomenological and scientific; the thinkers engaged with are both classical and contemporary; the methodologies vary across disciplines; and the answers arrived at, in many instances, attempt to bridge a gap between philosophical and scientific approaches to the study of emotion.

In “How Can Emotions Be Both Cognitive and Bodily?”, *Michelle Maiese* situates herself within the long-standing debate between cognitive and feeling theories of emotion. This debate in part rests upon the assumption that whereas cognition and thought are abstract, intellectual, disembodied processes, bodily feelings are non-intentional and have no representational content. In rehearsing some of the main contours of this debate, Maiese clearly spells out one of the main problems of relying on this assumption: namely, that it precludes accounts of emotion from adequately characterizing both the intentionality *and* phenomenology of emotion. Such an assumption has set up a false dichotomy regarding the emotions that has subsequently clouded the way in which emotions are both cognitively evaluative *and* bodily. Maiese aims to undo this false dichotomy between cognitive and bodily elements by outlining and developing an enactive account of the emotions that explains how the cognitive and bodily elements of emotions are necessarily integrated. According to her account, emotions are ways of engaging with and making sense of one’s surroundings. Maiese argues that at the core of emotional experience is what she calls “affective framing.” Affective framing is a spontaneous, non-inferential, pre-reflective, bodily, and active way of making sense of our worldly and interpersonal affairs by sorting out and selecting first-personally relevant information. Our engagement with the world is already permeated, delineated, and appraised by our bodily feelings. Bodily feelings serve as the background out of which object-directed emotions, thoughts, and indeed all of our experiences arise and by biasing us towards certain affectively-charged situations, they help to determine the *cognitive* focus of our emotions. The notion of affective framing thus provides an alternative way of thinking about our emotions, one that necessarily connects the cognitive, intentional, and sense-making aspects of emotions with their phenomenal character.

The idea that our minds extend into the world – that is, that we are essentially worldly and embodied beings – is central to both classical and contemporary work in phenomenology. Such a view regarding our human embodiment and comportment to the world is both clearly and forcefully articulated in the works of both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Still, the topic of extended and embodied cognition is not proprietary to phenomenology. In fact, in recent years, the question of whether our minds extend has gathered sustained attention and treatment both within contemporary philosophy of mind as well as within the cognitive sciences. The claim that the mind extends into the world should not be understood as a commitment to semantic externalism, but rather as a commitment to vehicle externalism – only the latter is a thesis about the location of the *vehicles* of our mental processes and states. Vehicle externalism maintains that the vehicles of (at least some) mental processes and states extend beyond the non-neural body of the agent into the environment. It holds that the physical machinery that

enables a subject to possess mental states and run mental processes can be located (at least, partly) outside the subject's central nervous system.

Arguments in support of the claim the vehicles of *cognitive* processes extend abound in the relevant literature. Yet, the question of whether *emotions* extend has hitherto received little attention. In "Varieties of Extended Emotions," *Joel Krueger* aims to rectify that omission. His article contributes to the topic of vehicle externalism in at least two ways. First, Krueger provides a helpful taxonomy of the different ways in which one could hold that emotions extend. He helpfully clarifies between the hypothesis of bodily extended emotions (HEBE) and the hypothesis of environmentally extended emotions (HEEE) and shows that even though both varieties of extended emotions are empirically plausible, only HEEE is a case of *genuine* extended cognition. Second, Krueger further distinguishes between two varieties of HEEE and shows how one of them enjoys the support of a number of different empirical findings. Specifically, Krueger argues that, at least in some cases, music can come to function as an external tool for feeling. Music is capable of enhancing the functional complexity of our capacities for generating and sustaining emotional experiences. As such, music can be considered a literal *part* of the *vehicles* of emotional or affective experiences.

In "The Temporal Dynamic of Emotional Emergence," *Thomas Desmidt, Mael Lemoine, Catherine Belzung, and Natalie Depraz* weave together phenomenological and neurophysiological arguments in order to offer a model of emotional emergence that delineates the experiential structures of time involved in emotional experiences. One of the many important and noteworthy contributions that the authors make in this rich and suggestive article is a rejection of the contention that surprise is a primary emotion. Instead, they maintain that surprise is a process that is essential to primary emotions insofar as it is integral to the temporal structure of emotions and to the dynamics of emotional emergence. In addition, the authors also argue for and highlight the importance of cardiovascular activity in the temporalization of emotional experience. In keeping with a neurophenomenological approach, Desmidt et al.'s account yields a model of emotional emergence and of the structure of the temporal dynamic in emotions that is accessible to and testable by both first- and third-personal approaches. Thus, the authors do not simply integrate products of phenomenological and neurophysiological research in an attempt to support their account; importantly, they also articulate the benefits of that integration and explicate some of the concrete ways in which such an interdisciplinary cooperation may continue.

In "Commitment and Attunement," *Craig DeLancey* draws together two seemingly opposing accounts of emotions: a phenomenological account and an evolutionary functionalist account. Although it may seem as though there is little room for productive interaction between these two approaches, he argues that Heidegger's notion of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and evolutionary functionalist theories of emotion can be understood—at least for some affects—as two perspectives on the same phenomenon. Notwithstanding important tensions between the methods and commitments of these two very different traditions, which DeLancey acknowledges, he claims that in thinking about them alongside one another each can challenge and provide productive insights to the other. For the phenomenological account, emotions reveal objects as having a role in how we act in specific situations and offer courses of possible action that seem appropriate. For the evolutionary functionalist account, emotions have not evolved to be mere appendages of

rational deliberation nor are they sources of preferences or desires; rather, they play strategic roles in action by serving as motivations to kinds of behaviors. After developing the parallel between these two positions more precisely, DeLancey concludes by noting how both accounts stand to benefit from a dialogue with each other. By introducing phenomenological insights to evolutionary functionalist accounts, the latter can be broadened and deepened to include social interaction and other emotions and moods such as *Angst* and boredom that have heretofore been unexamined by this approach. By introducing evolutionary functionalist insights to phenomenological accounts, the latter might be spurred to greater precision devoting more attention to distinct kinds of emotions and their differences.

In “Depression as an Existential Feeling or De-situatedness? Distinguishing structure from mode in psychopathology,” *Anthony Vincent Fernandez* presents and develops an alternative phenomenological account of depression. His point of departure is an engagement with and challenge of Matthew Ratcliffe’s (Heideggerian-inspired) work in this area. Fernandez contends that Ratcliffe’s explanation of depression in terms of deep moods or existential feelings – that is, by considering changes to the (ontic) *mode* of human existence – is limited. By drawing upon both Heidegger’s distinction between situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*) and mood (*Stimmung*) as well as on Merleau-Ponty’s critique of traditional transcendental phenomenology, Fernandez highlights the ways in which depression not only results in changes to the mode of human existence, but also, and more profoundly, alters the very (ontological) structure of human existence. By understanding depression as a change in structure – viz., a “loss,” “erosion,” or “degradation” of the degree to which one is situated in and attuned to the world – Fernandez broadens and deepens Ratcliffe’s account. Fernandez concludes by arguing that drawing distinctions between disorders of structure and mode of human existence offers us new tools for both delineating among and improving upon the currently heterogeneous categories of psychiatric disorders in the DSM-5.

In “Passive Fear,” *Anthony Hatzimoysis* undertakes a critical investigation of the phenomenon of passive fear with the aim of criticizing theories of emotions that conceive of emotions as existing, at least in principle, independently of their behavioral manifestations. Hatzimoysis helpfully and clearly distinguishes between two different cases of passive fear – freezing in fear and tonic immobility – and examines *why* tonic immobility occurs. He contends that the commonly offered explanation of tonic immobility—namely, that it occurs because it is an adaptive and often deliberate mechanism that allows the subject to escape danger – is unsatisfactory. In fact, Hatzimoysis shows that even if such an account were to hold in the case of animals, it would still fail to offer an adequate explanation of the phenomenon in the case of humans. A different approach to the phenomenon of tonic immobility is thus needed and Hatzimoysis offers such an account by drawing upon Sartre’s theory of emotions. Following Sartre, Hatzimoysis holds that tonic immobility should be understood as an *unreflective* solution to the perception of a threat or danger. As such, tonic immobility is not a deliberate trick or response on behalf of the agent with the aim of survival. Still, tonic immobility is a *meaningful* response to a perceived situation. It is bereft neither of meaning nor of function and it offers the subject a type of refuge – even if that refuge is not one that ultimately amounts to an escape from the danger.

Building upon Husserl's work on the intentionality of emotions, *Panos Theodorou* offers a novel phenomenological approach to understanding and articulating the nature of emotive experiences. In "Pain, Pleasure, and the Intentionality of Emotions as Experiences of Values," he explores the significance of the affective feelings of pleasure and pain and argues that such feelings are, in general, recordings of how we are faring in the world. Specifically, Theodorou maintains that the feelings of pleasure and pain are affective ways in which we live through our perceptual systems. As such, they are qualitative reports of the function and state of our senses and instincts as we engage in worldly and social interactions. Yet, the importance of the feelings of pleasure and pain is not exhausted by the fact that such feelings are the ways in which the character of our bodies and of our interactions with the world are qualitatively manifested to ourselves. The feelings of pleasure and pain also turn out to be fundamental to emotions proper: emotions, according to Theodorou, are the intentional apprehensions of what is revealed by the feelings of pleasure and pain. By grounding emotions in the basic feelings of pleasure and pain and in what such feelings reveal, Theodorou's phenomenological analysis of emotions succeeds in making a strong case for the normative character of emotions, and, at the same time, offers a phenomenologically-motivated account of the normativity of emotions.

Finally, we are very excited to include in this special issue a book symposium dedicated to *Martha Nussbaum*'s latest monograph on the emotions, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. In its focus on the emotions, *Political Emotions* revisits, rethinks, and builds upon a number of themes from her other two works on emotions: *Hiding from Humanity* (2004) and *Upheavals of Thought* (2001). In this remarkable, cross-disciplinary, and highly original work, Nussbaum considers the relationship between emotions (particularly, love) and political stability. Nussbaum carefully and rigorously develops an account of emotions, which is essential to the stability of political principles, which motivates commitment to and participation in common goals, and which, ultimately, promotes a decent and just society. It is clear that Nussbaum's book is bound to be influential and formative of philosophical discussions on the political role of emotions. We are delighted that the special issue has served as a forum in which Nussbaum had the opportunity to continue working on the nature and importance of political emotions by considering and responding to commentaries by *Rick Anthony Furtak* and *Alison McQueen*.

This special issue would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of individuals. We are extremely grateful to the Editors of *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, for providing us with the opportunity to put together this special issue. We would also like to thank all of the anonymous reviewers for their hard work. Their thoughtful, generous, and rigorous reports have undoubtedly contributed to the quality of the special issue. Finally, we would like to thank everyone who submitted his or her work to be considered for publication in the special issue. We received a great number of submissions – a number that far exceeded our expectations – and judging by that number alone, analyses and investigations of the nature of emotions occupy rightly, we think, a prominent and central role in the philosophical discourse. Given their importance in our personal and social lives, it could not have been any other way.