

**Stony Brook University
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Abstract

Emotion as First Philosophy

By

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Cognitivist theories of emotion say the intentional content of an emotion is a propositional judgment, and bodily sensations aren't meaningful unless a propositional judgment relates them to states of affairs. However, I argue that cognitivism assumes a logocentric bias that makes it untenable for four reasons: (1) bodily sensations have a deeper, non-propositional intentionality, (2) cognitivism has a paradoxical account of passivity, (3) cognitivism is incompatible with the neuroscience of emotion, and (4) politically, logocentrism results in a colonizing gaze that's ineffective for combating hate, bigotry, and fascism. Resolving these shortcomings, I propose a non-propositional theory of emotional intentionality, influenced by Sara Ahmed and Merleau-Ponty, which I call the AMP theory of emotion. Interpreting the phenomenological implications of Lisa Barrett's work on the neuroscience of emotion, I defend three claims: (i) the intentional object of an emotion is what Ahmed calls an "affective economy," (ii) emotions constitute a historicized, non-propositional way of perceiving, and (iii) habituating a way of perceiving constitutes the Self or Ego. Neuroscience defines emotions as our brain's best interpretation for how our affects are directed toward a goal. Since the brain constructs emotions by relying on past experiences we are responsible for our emotions to the extent that our present behavior shapes how the brain constructs emotions in the future. Thus, a major implication for the AMP theory is that emotional responsibility is the foundation for ethical responsibility. Emotions are the foundation for sense-making and we experience them as primary ethical acts. And to the extent that emotional intentionality is the foundation for perception, Self, and ethics this warrants closer study of emotion as first philosophy. I conclude by analyzing the role of emotions in two rivaling modes of authenticity: Nietzsche's "sovereign individual" and Ahmed's pluralist or dialectical Self. I argue that Nietzsche's authenticity is made in bad faith because all perceiving is influenced by the intersubjective life-world. Moreover, the "pathos of distance"—his authentic lack of emotional commitments to Others—constitutes a fascist political ontology bolstered by Alt-Right fascism. By contrast, the pluralist Self recognizes its intersubjective foundation through an emotional politics of acknowledgment.

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