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"You're Not Sick, You're Just In Love":
Emotion as an Interpretive System

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"Are there basic emotions?" is such a deceptively simple question that it deserves to be deconstructed. So before answering "yes," "no," "maybe," or "don't trust anyone who says they really know," I want to puzzle a bit over the meaning of the two key terms in the question, for their meanings are deeply contested and by no means obvious.

When it comes to questions about "emotions"—for example, whether some of them are "basic"—there is a good deal of "cross-talk" in the relevant literatures in psychology, anthropology, and biology. This is largely because theorists from different schools of thought, guided by somewhat different assumptions about psyche, symbol, soma, and nature, have used those common everyday English words to construct somewhat different objects of investigation. Scholars have talked past each other because they have answered the question "Are there basic emotions" with different intellectual objects in mind.

The goals of this essay are twofold. To trace the broad outlines of a "symbolic," "interpretive," or "intentional" theory of the emotions¹ by setting it in contrast with other theories of somatic and affective experience. To address the question "Are there basic emotions?" (1) by asking whether people everywhere in the world give meaning and shape to their somatic and affective experiences as "emotions"; and (2) by asking whether those peoples around the world who do "emotionalize" their somatic and affective experiences tend to use the same emotions to give meaning and shape to their experiences. To both questions I give the answer "do not trust anyone who says they really know."

My general claim is that "emotion" terms are names for particular interpretive schemes (e.g., "remorse," "guilt," "anger," "shame") of a particular story-like, script-like, or narrative kind that any people in the world might (or might not) make use of to give meaning and shape to their somatic and affective "feelings." More specifically, "feelings" (both somatic and affective) have the shape and meaning of an

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"emotion" when they are experienced as a perception of some self-relevant condition of the world and as a plan of action for the protection of dignity, honor, and self-esteem. My claim is that we do not yet know whether all peoples of the world emotionalize their feelings to the same extent, or whether they emotionalize their feelings with the same "emotion" schemes when they do. I suggest that alternative interpretive schemes for the diagnosis of somatic and affective experience include schemes for "sickness," "bewitchment," and moral "suffering."

Part 1: Basics and Emotions

The phrase "essentially contested concept" was not coined with the "emotions" in mind, but it might have been. Everything from their substance to their distribution to their logical form is a subject of debate.

With regard to their *substance*, for every William James who claims that the emotions are reducible to feelings of bodily states there is an Errol Bedford (1962) who claims they have nothing to do with feelings or sensations or psychological facts at all, but are rather linguistic ploys for imputing responsibility and blame and for praising and criticizing conduct (as, for example, in "I hope you are ashamed of yourself, or 'I sure envy your technique'").

With regard to the *distribution* of the emotions, for every Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989; pp. 90) who claim that there exists "a set of basic emotion modes" (viz., happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust) that "should be universally accepted as discriminable categories of direct experience"² or for every Paul Ekman (1973; pp. 219-220) who claims that regardless of language, culture, and history "these facial expressions are labeled with the same emotion terms: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise" there is an Anna Wierzbicka (n.d., also see 1990) who points out (with those assertions by Johnson-Laird & Oatley and Ekman explicitly in mind) that the whole world does not speak English; that English words such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust encode concepts that are "different from those encoded in the emotion terms of different languages"; that "in fact, there are NO emotion terms which can be matched neatly across language and culture boundaries"; that "there are NO universal emotion concepts, lexicalized in all the languages of the world"; and that it is all too easy in the translation process to unwittingly assimilate other peoples' linguistic meanings to an ethnocentric set of analytic categories—the abstract "emotional" states favored by the English-speaking world.

Undoubtedly most anthropologists will appreciate Wierzbicka's sensitivity to the all too often glossed over problem of translation. In my own experience the mapping of lexical items across languages has always seemed especially hazardous when it comes to the characterization of psychological states, in part because of the way culture and psyche are interdependent and make each other up. Across languages, the range of implications, suggestions, and connotations of psychological state terms do not easily map, at least not *lexically*; and to adequately understand the meaning of the terms in either language is to understand a good deal about different local systems of values and particular ways of life. Under such circumstances of hazardous lexical

mapping, any strong claim about the actual distribution around the world of the "emotions," as we define them, is bound to be controversial, and cannot be settled by innocently pointing out that according to some dictionary or bilingual informant there is in this or that language a term for this or that emotion.

Indeed, when it comes to the "emotions," even their *logical form* (as expressed in such commonplace English language terms as "sad," "happy," "angry," "envious," "remorseful," "homesick," or "ashamed") is a matter of dispute. Some argue that emotions are "concepts," that is to say, logicosemantic forms such as triangles or bachelors, which can, through conceptual analysis, be given strict definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient standards or logical essences. Which "standards" (physiological events, "feelings," verbal reports using terms for feelings, antecedent events, verbally expressed interpretations of antecedent events, facial expressions, etc.) should be included in the definition is itself quite unsettled.

"Concepts subsist" (so it is said) outside of time and space, which is why one does not have to travel anywhere in this world to discover whether a "bachelor" is a "marriageable unmarried male." The universal validity of a "concept" is guaranteed by its definition. The way one discovers the meaning of "bachelor" is through conceptual (logical) analysis. One asks competent speakers of the English language "Would you call the Pope a 'bachelor'?" Is a married male with one wife in a polygamous society a "bachelor"? In this way one discovers, as in the case of the Pope, that there is more to being a "bachelor" than just being an unmarried male. "Marriageability" is also a necessary standard, although, as in the case of the legal polygamist, it is not sufficient. And so forth. Any anthropologists who came up with an exotic counterclaim (e.g., that among the Bongo-Bongo "bachelors" are monogamously married virginal females) would simply reveal that they misunderstood the meaning of the English term.

If there is a "concept" named "sadness" defined by a strict standard (e.g., for sake of argument, paralleling Smedslund, 1991, a concept with a stipulated logical essence meaning "the way human beings feel when the things they want are thought to be permanently unattainable"), then that is what it universally and eternally means (for if it meant anything else it would not be the concept named "sadness"). It would be foolhardy to go searching in the world for the concept, for it subsists in its definition, and *must* exist, by definition, everywhere in the world where there are human beings who have wants and feelings, and where the things they want are thought to have become permanently unattainable.

With regard to the logical form of the emotions, an alternative view is that "emotions" are more like natural objects such as plants and animals, whose essence can only be known by finding them in time and space, inspecting them, and intercorrelating their perceptible properties (e.g., body posture, facial movements, skin temperature, heart rate acceleration, causal antecedent events, etc.).

Yet still others (and I am one of them) argue that "sadness" and "guilt" and other "emotions" are not really natural objects at all. Unlike tigers and elm trees, which exist in the world as perceptible kinds that one can directly point at and inspect, the "emotions," it is claimed, are transcendent "narratives" or "scripts" and the biochemical states, social events, expressive signals, phenomenological reports, action tendencies, and judgments that we associate with "emotions" as symptoms or indexes

are not unified in the same way as are such clusters of natural object attributes as stripes, fur, sharp nails, whiskers, and a capacity to deliver a dangerous bite. Precisely what that other way might be is a subject of this essay.

Not only are there disagreements about the substance, distribution, and logical form of the "emotions," but there are difficulties with the idea of "basic" as well. In the psychological, linguistic, and philosophical literatures on "basic objects," "basic terms," and "basic concepts" the idea of a basic object, term, or concept has been used quite variously to connote any or all of the following: the elementary, the inherent, the salient, the abstract, the widely distributed, the empirically universal, the logically necessary, the functionally indispensable, the important, the natural, the deeply seated, the unalterable, the perceivable, the minimal set, the ontogenetically original, the phylogenetically original, the generic in a taxonomic scheme of classification, the level at which perception, thought, memory, and communication take place. There may be other senses as well.

In the context of studies of basic "concepts," "basic" often refers to those concepts that are the elementary, primitive, nonreducible building blocks for all definitions. By that line of reasoning (e.g., Wierzbicka) there are no basic emotions because emotion concepts (e.g., angry, sad) are not conceptual simples; they are themselves complexes, which are reducible to more elementary or primitive concepts (e.g., feel, bad, want, think). Most cluster and scaling analyses of emotions classify the emotions by reducing them to nonemotional primitives such as arousal (+/-) and feels good (+/-).

In the context of studies of basic "terms," "basic" often refers to those linguistic expressions that are monolexic, abstract, and general (e.g., "red" rather than "strawberry," "cherry," "crimson," or "blood-like"). If one adheres to that approach, basic emotions exist only in those languages that lexicalize their expressions into monolexic, abstract, and general terms, although the psychological importance of the linguistic shift from a metaphorical nonbasic expression such as "a broken heart" to a basic abstraction such as "sad" or from a metonymic nonbasic expression such as "to bite your tongue" to a basic abstraction such as "shame" is entirely obscure. (For a discussion of biting the tongue as a facial sign and linguistic idiom of "shame" in Orissa, India, see Menon & Shweder, 1992.)

In the context of studies of basic "objects," intellectual anarchy is more the rule. "Basic" emotions are sometimes said to be that minimal set of simple emotions out of which all others can be generated through blends or through parameter setting, although it is by no means clear in what sense the postulated "basic" emotions ("sadness," "fear," etc.) are simpler than postulated nonbasic emotions such as love, homesickness, trepidation, regret, interest, or boredom. It is not even clear why some "objects" (surprise) are treated as emotions while others (curiosity, awe, optimism, piety, sympathy) are not.

"Basic" emotions are sometimes said to be that small set of "generic" emotions out of which all other emotions can be taxonomized as subordinates. Research on object taxonomies (see D'Andrade, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1985) has revealed that any folk hierarchical system of classification has no less than three and not more than six levels of classification. An example of a six-level taxonomic hierarchy is "plant-tree-evergreen-pine-white pine-Western white pine," although it might be argued (as

Anna Wierzbicka has argued to me in a personal communication) that this example mixes together folk and scientific lexical labels (in folk discourse, as Wierzbicka notes, one can point at a pine and say "look at that tree," but it seems quite unfolksy or somewhat technical to say while pointing at a pine "look at that evergreen" or "look at that plant").

It has proved impossible to determine the generic or basic or psychologically salient object from principles of taxonomy *per se* (D'Andrade, 1991). In "color" classification the generic or basic or salient level is the most inclusive level ("blue" rather than "turquoise") that exists just *one* level below the level of "color." In "plant" classification, depending on how one constructs the classification, the generic or basic or salient level might be the most inclusive level ("evergreen" instead of "pine") that exists just *two* levels below "plant." "Tree" exists one level below "plant" but it is not a basic or generic or salient object. It has yet to be demonstrated that the various properties of the "emotions" in fact form a taxonomy or can be arranged such that (e.g.) all the properties of "anger" (e.g., the desire to attack) are included among the properties of "scorn," all the properties of "sadness" (e.g., the inclination to withdraw from interpersonal contacts) included among the properties of "regret," or all the properties of "fear" (e.g., the desire to flee) included among the properties of "trepidation." Loose analogies to genuine taxonomic systems abound but they are not very convincing.

It is known from research on basic objects that those objects that are more salient (frequency of use, ease of recall) are not predictable from their formal or structural level in a taxonomy. Instead, the most salient "objects" are the ones that are concrete and visual (e.g., an apple, a chair, a knife, a cat). Saliency seems to measure perceptibility. Nonperceptible abstractions (superordinates, collections, or functions such as fruit, furniture, weapon, pet) are not psychologically salient (D'Andrade, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1985). It might follow that psychological states (e.g., pain, happiness, embarrassment) for which there are perceptible facial icons (a grimace, a smile) or visible signs (e.g., blushing) might be more salient than other states. It does not seem coincidental that the "emotions" held out by Western theorists as "basic" emotions are those interpretive schemes associated with a memorable visual image, which, in extreme cases, is sometimes taken to be the very object of the emotion itself. Some of our most important emotion schemes (e.g., guilt, love, empathy, remorse), however, contain no facial icon or other visible sign.

Basic emotions are sometimes said to have universal antecedent events that serve as their cause. The notion of an "antecedent event" is doubly misleading here. It is a trivial exercise for any anthropologist to generate long lists of antecedent events (ingesting cow urine, eating chicken five days after your father dies, kissing the genitals of an infant boy, being complimented about your pregnancy, caning a child, touching some one's foot or shoulder, being addressed by your first name by your wife, *ad infinitum*) about which the emotional judgments of a Western observer would not correspond to the native's evaluative response.

One part of the muddle here is that the phrase "antecedent event" is not really meant to refer to an event at all but rather to a self-involving state of the world and one's relationship to it, to an (abstract) interpretation of an event as (e.g.) loss, injustice, abuse, frustration, danger, status degradation, etc. Another part of the

muddle is that these kinds of abstract interpretations are not causally antecedent to the emotion; they are part and parcel of the narrative structure that gives shape and meaning to the emotion (see Shweder, 1993).

In other words, the identity of the "emotion" is not conceptually independent of the identity of the interpreted event as (e.g.) "loss" or "injustice" or "abuse" or "danger" or what have you. The experience of the Bongo-Bongo would not be "sadness" if the story to be told was about the somatic experiences (e.g., fatigue and loss of appetite), affects (e.g., emptiness and feelings of "soul loss"), and actions (withdrawal from social contacts) associated with the occurrence of "novelty" or of "fame," unless we were willing (as is so often gratuitously done in cross-cultural attributions of mental states) to interpret their "novelty" or "fame" as a disguised or hidden or unconscious form of "loss." If Bongo-Bongo mothers smiled and celebrated whenever their children died, we would either interpret the death as some kind of hidden gain or we would interpret their smile and celebration as some kind of defense against sadness. We would not say that "loss" has now been observed to be an antecedent to "happiness." The interpretive scheme labeled "happiness" has no place in its narrative structure for true "loss" as an antecedent event.

Indeed, who needs to invoke the Bongo-Bongo to make the point that "antecedent events" are neither events nor real causal antecedents but rather slots in our script-like or narrative interpretive schemes? Imagine people in our own culture who feel listless, deflated, disinclined to smile and who lose interest in the world when they get the things they want. Because our official theory of the emotions has no explicit scheme for making reflective sense of those feelings and action tendencies in that context, you may find yourself tempted to think of their "gain" as merely apparent, disguising some kind of unspoken or unacknowledged loss.

In other words, the universality of the connection between an "antecedent event" (more accurately an "interpretation of a condition of the world and of our relationship to it, for example, as "loss") and an "emotion" (e.g., "sadness") is guaranteed by our very conception of the emotion. What is not guaranteed is that our feelings (our somatic and affective experiences) must be given shape and meaning as "emotions," or that when our feelings are "emotionalized" the same script-like or narrative structures will link the same "antecedent events" to the same somatic and affective experiences and to the same action tendencies around the world or even across individuals within the same culture. Not only is *that* not guaranteed, it has never been shown.

Part 2: What Is a Theory of Basic Emotions About?

To summarize so far, "emotions" are neither "concepts" nor "things" nor "terms" in a language. They are complex narrative structures that give shape and meaning to somatic and affective experiences—feelings of the body (e.g., muscle tension) and of the soul (e.g., emptiness), whose unity is to be found neither in strict logical criteria nor in the perceptible features of objects, but rather in the types of self-involving stories they make it possible for us to tell about our feelings.

In each of those "emotion" stories (the story of "fear" or "shame" or "sadness"), somatic and affective experience (e.g., tiredness, arousal, emptiness, loss of appetite) is represented as a perception of some self-involving state of the world (e.g., of loss) leading to a plan (e.g., the desire to die). Each story combines within a single plot some concept of the conditions of the world and one's relationship to it (e.g., loss, frustration, transgression) that would make this or that somatic and/or affective experience (e.g., tension, tiredness, emptiness, headaches) accurate, valid, or justified, as well as some concept of the missions (e.g., to hide, to confess, to attack, to protect) motivated by a perceptive body.

These "stories" or "scripts" or "narratives" are not the kinds of things that are the exclusive property of those who have books or narrate tales to one another on special occasions. They are instead the script-like or story-like interpretive schemes that organize lived experience. Of course, they need to be explicitly formulated if one has a theoretical interest in emotional functioning, but one can give emotional shape and meaning to one's somatic and affective experiences without reflective knowledge of the script. The narratives or scripts are implicit in the feelings they give shape and meaning to, and it is for us, as students of the emotions, to spell them out.

Most important, for those whose feelings have the meaning and shape of an "emotion" story, the experience of "fear" or "shame" or "sadness" is not something independent of or separable from the conditions that justify it or from the actions it demands. The "emotion" is the whole story, the whole package deal—a kind of somatic event (fatigue, chest pain, goose flesh) and/or affective event (panic, expansiveness, emptiness) experienced as a kind of perception (of loss, gain, threat, possibility) linked to a kind of plan (attack, withdraw, confess, hide, explore).

As story-like interpretive schemes the "emotions" can, of course, be classified and reclassified in numerous ways, by attending to different slots in the script—the self-involving state of the world, the somatic experience, the affective experience, the mission or plan for action, perhaps even the expressive mode.

Thus, for example, focusing on the missions of the emotions, there are "affiliative" emotions such as love, happiness, interest, and guilt, which lead you to seek out others for some purpose (e.g., to express affection or to celebrate or to confess), and "avoidant" emotions such as sadness, contempt, disgust, and shame, which lead you to hide or distance yourself or withdraw or to engage in solitary melancholy contemplation.

There are some emotions, such as happiness or anger, that can be arranged along a somatic temperature scale from "warm" to "hot" and other emotions, such as sadness or fear, that can be arranged along a somatic temperature scale from "cool" to "cold."

And there are some emotions, such as happiness and love, that can be placed in an affect cluster associated with feeling puffed up, full, and open, and other emotions such as sadness and guilt, which can be placed in an affect cluster associated with feeling deflated, empty, and closed.³

There are emotions, such as grief, envy, and rage, that you are advised to manage by "standing up to them" or suppressing them, and other emotions, such as joy or love, that we manage by giving them encouragement or permission to "flood" our somatic and affective experiences.

There are some emotions, such as happiness, anger, and disgust that, like pain (a nonemotional feeling), are associated with perceptible facial icons (the grimace, the smile, the frown), some of which are universal, and other emotions (e.g., guilt, remorse, optimism, empathy) for which there is no facial expression.

There are humoral classifications of the emotions, which group the emotions by their presumed psychobiological or somatic causal links to a particular fluid of a particular internal organ. For example, even in our contemporary culture, which has long since officially abandoned humoral theories of human functioning, many people associate emotions such as anger, fear, love, sympathy, envy, and sadness with conditions of the blood, a humor of the heart. The blood boils (anger). It curdles (fear). It flows profusely because the heart pounds or breaks (love). It tires or ceases to flow because the heart is heavy or there is a stone resting on one's heart (sadness) or because one has a heart of stone (lacking in sympathy). Because of a lack of blood flow one can turn green (with envy), and so on.

Organs and fluids serve taxonomic functions in the ethnosciences and cultural psychologies of many peoples of the world and it is not hard to understand why. For example, normal versus abnormal conditions of the liver (a cool liver, a splitting liver) can be used as a way of talking about, explaining, and classifying positive (purified) versus negative (poisonous) feeling states. It can serve this taxonomic function because of various beliefs about the function of the liver—for example, that it removes toxins from the blood and harbors poisons. From a cross-cultural and historical perspective the psychobiological imagination has had a field day mapping liver malfunctions (and the envisioned release of toxins into one's "system") onto various kinds of negative feeling states, somatic and affective.

Nevertheless, however one chooses to sort or resort the "emotions" and however useful or pointless, defensible or indefensible the classification, a somatic or affective experience (a "feeling" of body or soul, e.g., muscle tension, emptiness, agitation, shakiness, a pain in the chest, nausea) becomes an "emotional" experience (e.g., anger, disgust) rather than just a somatic or affective experience (muscle tension, emptiness, agitation, shakiness, a pain in the chest, nausea) when physical, social, and moral events (loss of control, violations of expectations, success at goal attainment, insult, ethical failure, community censure, a challenge from an unworthy inferior, vulnerability to danger, transgressions of the natural order of things) psychosomatically reach in and touch one's feelings in ways that implicate the self.

It is primarily for that reason that the "emotions" should be viewed as the symbolic/intentional/interpretive side of somatic and affective experience. To emotionalize one's feelings (e.g.) as "guilt," "pity," "fury," "contempt," or "dread" is to give a "reading" to somatic and affective experience, to look through the tension, palpitations, nausea, and heat to what they are about. The "emotions" re-present somatic and affective experience not simply as a feeling (as tiredness or tension or a heartache) but as a perception (e.g., betrayal by trusted allies) and a plan (e.g., retaliation, realignment, withdrawal, and so forth). An "emotion" is a feeling that activates a self-esteem program or person schema. It is a somatic or affective experience with a mission and with more than (or other than) just a biochemical or somatic cause.

Every culture I know or have read about seems to have many different linguistic resources for representing somatic and affective experiences. Thus, I am going to assume (with due respect to radical skepticism and the androids of science fiction) that all peoples of the world have "feelings." In my conception, the capacity to feel is a "basic" feature of normal human functioning. Once that assumption is made, the variety of linguistic resources for representing somatic and affective experience deserves close examination, for there are subtle and not so subtle problems in translating these representations and it is all too easy to succumb to the illusion that other peoples are representing their feelings as "emotions" when they are not. These problems of translation should be apparent even from a moment of reflection on our own language use.

Within our own language and culture there are multiple ways to give expression to somatic experience, which may or may not involve a discourse of "emotions." To be "nauseous" is not the same as to be "disgusted"; nausea is a nonemotionalized feeling of the body that is neutral as to its cause, while "disgust" is "nausea" emotionalized by interpreting it as a perception (directing our attention to some agent which is its cause) with a mission (disappropriation, distancing, avoidance). Because the "emotions" (love, anger, sadness) are interpretive or symbolic forms integrating a somatic or affective experience into a single story as perception and plan, our names for the "emotions" make no direct reference to experience per se. Our actual "feelings" become transparent when emotionalized. By the time we have given shape and meaning to our experience as "being in love" or "being angry," we have seen through our feelings to the self-affirming and self-denying realities of our (physical, interpersonal, and moral) world.

Every culture, I believe, has a vast linguistic arsenal for giving expression to somatic and affective experiences in nonemotionalized terms. Thus, in our own culture we speak of feeling or being tired, hungry, relaxed, empty, shaky, weak, nauseous, clean, thirsty, dizzy, in pain, short of breath, itchy, tense, agitated, calm. To "walk on air" is to feel "lightheaded." To have "tired blood" is a way of talking about generalized fatigue. It may or may not be a body-part metaphor for the emotion of "sadness" or "depression."

This is true in other cultures as well. One must beware when translating the linguistic expressions of other people not to casually assimilate expressions for nonemotional feelings into our own reigning theory of the emotionalization of experience. The translation found in the dictionary or given to you by some bilingual informant may read "anger," but all the native may have said was "my liver is splitting," which, quite possibly, may be his or her way of giving expression to a nonemotional feeling (tension, heat) by means of a biochemical humoral theory of its genesis. It may not imply the same thing as "anger" at all, although it might.

In making translation decisions it is important to recognize that our contemporary theory of the "emotions" plays a rather special part in the history of human self-consciousness because it intrudes into an interpretative space that is occupied in many other cultures by theories of "bewitchment" (sorcery, evil eye, black magic, spirit attack) and "suffering" (sin, moral transgression, karma, spiritual debts that are acquired or inherited). In such cultures, theories of "bewitchment" and "suffering" typically compete, not only with each other, but also with local theories of "sickness"

(biochemical imbalance, fluid and fiber dysfunction, organ pathology, disease) to explain and help people manage the pleasant or painful, arousing or enervating immediacies of somatic and affective experience, and this is no less true of our contemporary theory of the "emotions." The metaphysics of nature and of transcendent realities that supported theories of "bewitchment" and "suffering" may no longer be popular in our official mainstream scientific culture but the problem they addressed—how to make sense of those somatic and affective experiences that have more than (or other than) just a somatic cause—has not gone away.

On a worldwide or historical scale the most frequent folk theories of somatic and affective experience are of three general kinds: (1) theories of "sickness" (a biochemical theory); (2) theories of "bewitchment" (an interpersonal theory); and (3) theories of "suffering" (a moral theory). (See Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, in press.) In the official culture of the contemporary Western world, theories of "bewitchment" (e.g., ghost attack) and of "suffering" (nature itself punishing those who sin) have been displaced by a general theory of mental or psychosomatic causation, of which the theory of the "emotions" is a subclass.

Not only do all cultures have multiple linguistic resources for representing nonemotionalized feelings, but every culture I know or have read about also seems to understand that there are three big causes—biochemical, interpersonal, and moral—of somatic or affective experience. What we seem to have contributed to the discussion is the suggestion that (unlike the biochemical causes of feelings, which we view as direct somatic causes) the interpersonal and moral causes of somatic and affective experiences are mediated by mental entities that come in the form of a limited number of abstract interpretive or symbolic schemes (which in English have been designated with names such as "anger," "sadness," "envy," "happiness," and "guilt," etc.).

While it may be debatable whether our theory of the "emotions" and of psychosomatic causation are superior to those other schools of interpretation preceding it, or whether they represent a fall in human self-consciousness, the only choice today that makes cultural common sense in popular and scientific Western discourse about feelings is the choice between a somatic (biochemical) interpretation and a psychosomatic (mental or emotional) one. As the songwriter knew so well, when it comes to the contemporary world, either you are "sick" or "you're just in love." You're never truly bewitched or suffering from karma.

Within the halls of the academy, Irving Berlin is not recognized as an expert in cultural psychology, yet within the lyrics of one of his many famous melodies can be found an expression of this culturally constituted choice between a somatic and psychosomatic reading of our feelings. The following lyrics are by Berlin. The bracketed, nonlyrical comments are, of course, my own.

"I hear music and there's no one there. [Auditory hallucinations] I smell blossoms and the trees are bare. [Olfactory hallucinations] All day long I seem to walk on air. [Dizziness] I wonder why. I wonder why. [Somatic experience as an invitation to investigate, to wonder what those feelings reveal about the state of one's body as a biochemical system or about the state of one's self as a mental system] I keep tossing in my sleep at night. [Insomnia, restlessness] And what's more I've lost my appetite. [Loss of interest in food] Stars that used to twinkle in the sky are twinkling in my

eyes. [Subject-object confusion] I wonder why. [Again, somatic experience as an invitation to investigate] You don't need analyzing. It is not so surprising. [These experiences are part of a manifest cultural script; depth (psycho) analysis is not required] That you feel very strange but nice. [Pleasant arousal] Your heart goes pitter patter. [Palpitations in the chest] I know just what's the matter. Cause I've been there once or twice." [These experiences are common in our culture]

And then, after a head on the shoulder of "someone who's older" and a "rub down with a velvet glove" (!) the lyrics conclude: "There is nothing you can take to relieve that pleasant ache. You're not sick, you're just in love." [The culturally constituted choice between a somatic versus psychosomatic explanation of our feelings]

What I am suggesting is that our contemporary theory of the emotions is our culture's contribution to a universal intellectual enterprise aimed at the interpretation of feelings. A somatic or affective experience is an invitation to wonder why, to ask what those feelings reveal, to investigate various orders of reality (biochemical, interpersonal, moral), to diagnose one's biochemical, interpersonal, and moral standing in the world, and to make plans accordingly. Indeed, that may be one of the significant functions of feelings, to serve as a feedback system at the level of individual consciousness so that one can be alert to one's standing in the world (see Levy, 1984b).

It then becomes relevant to ask: What does our contemporary theory of the "emotions" distinctively contribute to this universal intellectual enterprise? Are the "emotions" the only way to give shape and meaning to somatic and affective experience? To what degree are feelings emotionalized or not emotionalized in different cultures and by means of which particular "emotion" and "nonemotionalized" schemes?

Of course, none of this is to deny the possible existence of "basic" self-involving conditions of the world and of our relationship to it (e.g., loss and gain, protection and threat), "basic" somatic feelings (e.g., muscle tension, pain, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, breathlessness), "basic" affective feelings (e.g., agitation, emptiness, expansiveness), "basic" plans for self-management (e.g., to flee, to retaliate, to repair, to celebrate, to invest) or even the possible existence of "basic" emotions. Instead, the point of this deconstruction is to help focus the question "Are there basic emotions?" in the following way.

If there are "basic" emotions, then some subset of the script-like or narrative structures we name "sadness," "anger," "guilt," "love," "pity," "shame," "contempt," "pining," "sulky," etc., will give shape and lend meaning to the somatic and affective experiences (the "feelings") of people in all cultures. If there are basic emotions everyone in the world will, by means of their feelings, link the same self-involving conditions of the world (status loss and status gain, success and failure, protection and threat, blocking of a goal, novelty, etc.) to the same somatic and affective subsystems (fatigue, agitation, chest pain, emptiness, headaches, etc.) and to the same action tendencies or self-management strategies (to attack, to withdraw, to hide, to confess, to repair, etc.). At this point in the social sciences we know relatively little about the narrative structure of experience in different cultures, about the possibilities for coupling or decoupling "antecedent" conditions, somatic and

affective feelings, and action tendencies in the way we live in the world. We do not even know if the subsystems controlling somatic feeling in different populations are the same. There is no a priori reason to assume they are. Before we can answer questions about "basic emotions" with any real confidence, far more comparative research is needed unencumbered of ethnocentric illusions, philosophical naiveté, and question-begging methodologies. As we stand on the threshold of what I believe to be a bright new age of collaborative research on "cultural psychology" (Shweder, 1991a; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993), my answer to the question "Are there basic emotions?" is "Do not trust anyone who says they really know."

Notes

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1. Perhaps the most profound formulation of what today would be called a "symbolic" theory of the "emotions"—a theory of the "rasas" and their relationship to the "bhavas" and other psychological facts of various kinds—can be found in ancient and medieval Hindu Sanskrit writings and commentaries on drama and aesthetics—in particular, in the famous sixth chapter, the "Rasadhya," of the *Natyasastra*, a third-century text, as explicated by the tenth-century Kashmiri Brahman and philosopher Abhivana Gupta (see Masson & Patwardhan, 1970; Shweder, 1992).

2. The meaning of the term "direct" is ambiguous here, for it is unclear whether it means something like "already on-line" or "free of interpretation or symbolic mediation." When it comes to questions about "directness," some scholars might argue that acts of interpretation or symbolic mediation are performed so rapidly and at such a deep level that they are not consciously distinguishable from experience itself, which creates the illusion that they are unmediated or direct. On top of this argument might be placed another: We come into the world already equipped with complex and differentiated interpretive schemes, some of which undergo transformation throughout the life course as a result of interaction with cultural institutions and practices (including linguistic practices), which is what one ought to mean by "learning." Nothing in a symbolic-interpretive-intentional theory requires that one adhere to the innocent naive view that children come into the world innocent, naive, or as *tabula rasa*.

3. Notice how affects, which are the feelings of the self or the soul, require metaphorical designations—empty, full, closed, deflated. It is crucial for a symbolic-interpretive-intentional theory of the emotions that a distinction is drawn between emotions and affects. Affects are but one part of or slot in the more complex narrative organization of an emotion.

Most cluster analyses of large sets of terms for the emotions (e.g., Shaver et al., 1987) discover roughly similar metaphorical groupings. My speculation about the implications of this evidence is that informants simplify the demands of the sorting task by attending to similarities in the affect slot (see Gerber, 1986, for a cluster analysis of Samoan emotion terms and a thoughtful discussion of the affects). The researcher then selects one emotion term from the cluster to represent or designate the entire cluster, but this seems to me arbitrary and a great mistake. I would argue that the clusters discovered in these studies should not be designated with any "emotion" label, such as fear or sadness or anger. They are more properly thought of as affect clusters not as emotion clusters, in which various complex narrative structures such as sadness or guilt have been grouped together on the basis of some one point of similarity in their

script. For example, in the case of the cluster D labeled as "sadness" by Shaver et al. (1987, p. 1067), some of the co-elements in the cluster are the terms guilt, shame, and sadness. Why should this cluster be labeled "sadness"? It might just as well have been designated as a cluster unified by the affective experience of emptiness, deflation, and closure. I would relabel the clusters found by Shaver et al. with affect descriptors such as expansive, tight, deflated, aroused, puffed up, and panic. Descriptors from the slot of somatic experience (e.g., tired, trembling, erotically aroused) might be appropriate as well.

Looking at cluster analyses from around the world, one might speculate that there is an abstract affect space consisting of three or four contrastive dimensions—the self or the soul may feel empty versus full, expansive versus contracted, agitated versus still, pleased or displeased. Affect, not emotion, is in my view what the cluster analyses are about, despite the misleading emotion labels assigned to the clusters. The affective part of the narrative structure of anger consists of feelings of the self that are contracted, full, agitated, and unpleasant, but there is much more to anger or to any emotion than the specifications for its affect slot.