

Basic Emotions, Complex Emotions, Machiavellian Emotions

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Abstract

The current state of knowledge in psychology, cognitive neuroscience and behavioral ecology allows a fairly robust characterization of at least some, so-called ' basic emotions' - short-lived emotional responses with homologues in other vertebrates. Philosophers, however are understandably more focused on the complex emotion episodes that figure in folk-psychological narratives about mental life, episodes such as the evolving jealousy and anger of a person in an unraveling sexual relationship. One of the most pressing issues for the philosophy of emotion is the relationship between basic emotions and these complex emotion episodes. In this paper, I add to the list of existing, not necessarily incompatible, proposals concerning the relationship between basic emotions and complex emotions. I analyze the writings of ' transactional' psychologists of emotion, particularly those who see their work as a contribution to behavioral ecology, and offer a view of the basic emotion that focuses as much on their interpersonal functions as on their intrapersonal functions. Locating basic emotions and their evolutionary development in a context of processes of social interaction, I suggest, provides a way to integrate our knowledge of basic emotions into an understanding of the larger emotional episodes that have more obvious implications for philosophical disciplines such as moral psychology.

Keywords: emotion evolutionary psychology facial expression social construction machiavellian intelligence

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