

Reader's report on "In Defense of the Content-Priority View of Emotion"

This paper defends the content-priority view of emotions, according to which emotions are conceived as states that depend on prior states of value awareness against objections that have been recently raised by Jonathan Mitchell. The discussion is clear and the paper contains a number of sound points. In my view, there are a number of problems that need to be fixed before it can be published.

The author argues that the content-priority view follows for the claim that emotions are responses to value properties. The argument the author offers takes us from this claim to the conclusion by way of two premises. The first premise is that for an emotion to be a response to *x* is for that emotion to be felt "in the light or on occasion of *x* or, equivalently, for *x* to be a reason for which" a person feels that emotion (p. 3). The second premise is that for an emotion to be felt in the light of *x* (etc.), the person feeling the emotion must have a prior grasp of *x*, the value property.

Now, this is an interesting argument, but the author should flag that there can be disagreement at each step. One can hold that emotions are responses to value properties without holding that this entails that emotions are felt in the light of the evaluative features in question. That I fear the dog in response to the dog and its dangerousness does not entail that I fear the dog *in the light* of the dog's dangerousness. It might just be a causal relation that takes someone from the perception of the dog to the emotion of fear. Moreover, the claim that to feel an emotion in the light of a value property entails a prior grasp of the evaluative property is also controversial. In any case, there are different accounts of what motivating reasons for action consist in, some of which do not assume that acting in the light of a reason requires being in a state that represent that reason.

The author holds that, *pace* Mitchell, the content-priority view entails that emotions are directed at object under an evaluative aspects, so it need not qualify as the rival of the views according to which emotions have evaluative contents. It is not clear, however, that the content-priority view really can hold that emotions have intentional objects presented under an evaluative aspect. If emotions depend on states of value awareness, the most natural suggestion is that emotions are motivational states. Why would one want to hold that emotions have intentional objects presented under an evaluative aspect if that kind of content is already available given the prior awareness of value properties? There appears to be little reason to assume that the same content is simply taken up by the emotion.

The main problem with the paper is that it does not take seriously Mitchell's challenge regarding the specification of the prior awareness. The author holds that because "for us to so much as coherently think of emotions as taking objects, we are committed to the content-priority view" it is not true that "view's credentials as a serious contender among theories of emotion are contingent on further characterizing the prior value awareness" (p. 10). But this cannot be true even if one accepts that that we are committed to the content-priority view. For it could turn out that there is no way to defend the claim that there are prior states of value awareness. It is not the fact, if it is a fact, that we are

committed to the existence of such states that tends to make them pop into existence. So, Mitchell's challenge needs to be taken seriously. Now, the author appears to favour the view that the prior states of value awareness are states of seeing as. Insofar as seeing as requires the possession of concepts, as it is often assumed, this raises the question of whether the envisaged account would have to deny that animals are able to have emotions. This is a problem, because it would appear difficult to deny that cats and dogs, for instance, can feel fear, and indeed, we are happy to say that the cat is afraid of the dog because the dog is dangerous.