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Distinguishing the Phenomenal from the Cognitive: An Empirical Investigation into the Folk Concepts of Emotions

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Abstract

The two dominant theories on the nature of emotions are feeling theories (e.g., Prinz 2004) and cognitive theories (e.g., Lazarus 1991). The former take feelings to be the essential core aspect of emotions. The latter argue that emotions are based on judgements or some other conceptual states in order to account for the datum that emotions always seem to be directed towards events or objects. In this paper we argue that the controversy between feeling theories and cognitive theories rests on the false assumption that people do not distinguish emotional feelings from emotional judgements, i.e., that expressions of the form I feel x and I am x are largely intersubstitutable (Bennett & Hacker 2003). We present new empirical evidence from both corpus studies and a vignette study showing that feeling happy (sad/angry) and being happy (sad/angry) are two separate states that people are able to conceptually and linguistically distinguish.