



## CEMID Project glossary

### Emotion

Unveiling **the nature of emotion** is a difficult task. The main difficulty lies in unveiling the relationship between cognitive and non-cognitive factors involved in emotion. Some authors claim that **the very term "emotion" is problematical**, in that it strips its historical precedents –the passions, mainly– of their intrinsic reference to morality (2003, Dixon) Besides, what is the difference, if there is one, between passion, affection, sentiment and emotions?

Yet, the problem is not simply one of terminology (1996, Hansberg). There are **multiple theories on the nature of emotions**: theories that can be called *physiological*, which tend to integrate the emotions to a certain extent with sensations, with “brute facts”, which would have to be approached in causalist terms (the emotions would be caused by and because of); *evolutive and behavioral* theories, which believe them to be, above all, dispositions of behavior (for example, Darwin, William James, Skinner, Ryle); *cognitive theories*, for which emotions are basically some sort of evaluative judgments (Aristotle, Crisipus, Seneca, Aquinas, and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Anthony Kenny, Robert C. Solomon, William Lyons or, more recently, Martha C. Nussbaum).

**Contemporary thought continues to swing between two viewpoints**: on the one hand, the naturalist or innatist stance (represented by authors such as Paul Ekman, Carroll Izard, Robert Plutchik), for whom the emotions are evolutive tricks, adaptive syndromes brought about by natural selection; on the other, the cognitive point of view, (represented by authors such as Armon-Jones, Averill, Harré, Solomon or Nussbaum), who insist on the situational and cultural diversity of emotions.

Interestingly, neuroscientists such as Damasio or LeDoux have recently come closer to more cognitive positions. Moreover, although the interest in the influence of the emotions on modern medical theory is recent, the studies of Bound Alberti, Dylan, Kagan, Dror, or Wassmann show the importance of beliefs in the diagnosis and treatment of disease throughout history.

Without rejecting the biologist approach –which has links with Darwin’s work on the emotions– **the cognitive approach is of more interest for cultural and social analysis**. It opens up more interesting perspectives for the analysis of human behavior, both at the psychological (1999, Elster) and the social level (Winch).

Obviously, in no way does this mean that the causalist approach to emotions does not play an important role in certain contexts and as such is defended by some scholars (2003, Evans), whose interests are generally closer to the neurosciences and computation. However, **the clear contextual relativity of many emotions, as well as their intrinsically narrative structure, appears to advocate a psychological-social approach to the emotions**, and also justifies the pertinence of rhetoric, literature, and finally, the moral perspective (2003, Roberts).

The humanistic and cognitive approach is in tune with a sociological approach to the emotions, directed towards clarifying how social structure or form affects people’s emotional repertoire (1997, Wentworth & Ryan).

In fact, without deliberately intending to do so, **the great theoreticians of modern society have pointed out the affinity of modern society and certain emotions**.



In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Elias' work on the process of civilization is particularly instructive. And it is equally correct to take the opposite course, that is, to contemplate society from the perspective of the emotions felt by the social agents and spectators, in order to evaluate the degree of internalization of the different cultural elements, and thus to more clearly diagnose the peculiar emotional regime of contemporary societies, and the way in which individuals resolve or manage their emotional conflicts, and simultaneously define their identity.

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