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Born in 1939 in Inverness, Scotland

Studied Physiology and Psychology at Somerville College, Oxford University and History of Science at Harvard University

PROJECT

The Science of Emotion: History of Research from 1960 to the Present

A history of research on the emotions from the 1960s to the present, focusing on the debate between those who support a "cognitivist" approach, according to which the affects are intentional or "object-directed" and depend on cognitive appraisals of the world, and those who advocate an "anti-cognitivist" or "affect program" approach, according to which the emotions are hard-wired, reflex-like, species-typical genetic programs, behaviors, and physiological reactions.

Recommended Reading

Leys, Ruth. *Defining American Psychology: The Correspondence Between Adolf Meyer and Edward Bradford Titchener*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990.

Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 2000.

Leys, Ruth. *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming Fall 2007.

What If Anything Do Faces Reveal?

Toward a History of Research on the Emotions

In my last book, "From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After" (Princeton Press, 2007), I undertook to analyze the vicissitudes of the concepts of survivor guilt and shame in the United States from the post-World War II period to the present. In the course of my research I inevitably had to engage with the question of how the emotions in general had been conceptualized and studied. I became aware that two different paradigms of the emotions had vied for attention and success. One paradigm assumed that the emotions involve cognitive or intentional processes in the sense that they are "about" the objects to which they are directed and depend on cognitive appraisals of the world. The other paradigm assumed that the emotions are non-cognitive or non-intentional processes that can be defined as a set of discrete, inherited, reflex-like programs, behaviors, and physiological reactions.

In the last twenty or more years the non-intentionalist paradigm has displaced the intentionalist one by proving to be more attractive not only to scientists but more recently to humanists and cultural theorists as well. But is the non-intentionalist paradigm well founded? In particular, how valid are the arguments and arguments that have been adduced in its support? The more I engaged with these questions, the more I began to suspect that some of the decisive research on which the success of the non-intentionalist paradigm has crucially depended is at best problematic and at worst seriously inadequate. I was therefore fascinated and in a sense relieved to learn of the existence of a group of scientists in the emotion field who had not only begun to raise skeptical questions of the kind I had begun to entertain, but had recently produced a body of theoretical and research work that amounted to a fundamental challenge to the non-intentionalist paradigm. At the same time, it became clear to me that the opponents of the non-intentionalist paradigm faced significant difficulties in establishing their own point of view on what might be called a research-program basis.

I am now in the process of writing a history of research on the emotions in the United States (and to some extent in Europe as well) from the 1960s to the present. In my Colloquium talk I will present a small piece of the work I have been doing on this topic while at the Wissenschaftskolleg. In particular, I will offer a critical evaluation of the role the experimental study of facial expression has played in the attempt to establish a non-intentionalist science of the affects.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Leys, Ruth (Los Angeles, 2010)

Surveying the emotions

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1680019155>

Leys, Ruth (Chicago, Ill. [u.a.], 2000)

Trauma : a genealogy

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=306180839>