

# On Emotion Blindness: Understanding Emotions via Wittgenstein's Account of Aspect-Perception

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# Abstract

This essay explains and extends Robert C. Roberts's proposal to understand emotions as ways of seeing, or, in his terminology, as concern-based construals. Roberts's account of emotions is indebted to Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception, which are discussed in detail in Chapter I, along with Wittgenstein's related notion of forms of life. Chapter I also explains how both of these notions were used to facilitate the understanding of emotions by Wittgenstein himself as well as his followers and commentators. Chapter II discusses Roberts's own account of emotions, where the phenomenon of aspect-perception is used in a way that is different from those briefly outlined in Chapter I, in that it is meant to explain not third-person ascriptions of emotions, but rather how emotions are formed from the first-person perspective. It also highlights some key similarities between Roberts's notion of construals and aspect-perception as discussed by Wittgenstein, ultimately arguing that the formation of emotions is part of the phenomena of aspect-perception. This prepares the grounds for discussing, in Chapter III, a feature of aspect-perception neglected by Roberts, namely aspect-blindness in the case of emotions. Three possible sources of aspect- or emotion-blindness are distinguished, namely the range of concerns, the differences between worldviews, and the lack of linguistic capacities.

*Keywords:* aspect-blindness, aspect-perception, concern-based construals, emotion-blindness, emotions, forms of life, linguistic capacities, Roberts, Wittgenstein.

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# Chapter I. Wittgenstein: Aspect-Perception, Forms of Life, and the Emotions

One of the few places in which Wittgenstein's remarks touch upon the topic of emotions is his discussion of aspect-perception. When we see a human smile and recognise it as such, it is really an act of *perception* rather than interpretation, Wittgenstein suggests. Elsewhere in the *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>1</sup>, Wittgenstein also notes that 'A smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face.'<sup>2</sup> This section of the *PI* contains an implicit reference to one of the key notions in his late philosophy, namely the forms of life. Both of these notions, aspect-perception and forms of life, are central to the account of emotions I develop in this essay and thus require a sufficiently-detailed expository discussion, which is what the present chapter is mainly devoted for. A close look at the connection Wittgenstein seems to draw between emotions and aspect-perception will also help to highlight the difference between, on the one hand, a use that can be, and indeed has been<sup>3</sup>, made of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception in explaining third-person ascriptions of emotions, and, on the other, the proposal I develop here, drawing on Roberts's work<sup>4</sup>, to see aspect-perception as constitutive of emotions in the first-person case (which will be presented in Chapter II).

## A. Aspect-Perception

Wittgenstein starts his discussion of aspect-perception by contrasting two distinct cases, both of which we nevertheless call, and rightly so, instances of 'seeing'.

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, J. Schulte, P. Hacker. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Hereafter, *PI*.

<sup>2</sup> *PI*, §583.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Two uses of the word “see”.

The one: “What do you see there?” — “I see *this*” (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: “I see a likeness in these two faces” — let the man to whom I tell this be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself.

What is important is the categorial difference between the two ‘objects’ of sight.<sup>5</sup>

It is hard to do justice to all the issues at play in this remark (and those that will follow), because in his discussion of aspect-perception Wittgenstein attacks a number of widespread philosophical views, such as empiricist sense-datum theories, Cartesian inner-object theories of perception, Wolfgang Köhler’s Gestalt philosophy, and others; I will try to limit my expository discussion to the features of his account that are relevant to my overall argument. And we can safely say the following: In the first case, the ‘object’ of perception is a physical object; in the second, a likeness. The ‘object’ is in quotes because Wittgenstein is sceptical as to whether there is a sense in which likeness can be called an object at all (which would be required by certain theories of perception for the example to qualify as an instance of perception proper); yet, despite this difference, the second case is a case of seeing according to our normal use of the word. Still, the purpose of Wittgenstein’s example is to set the stage for discussion by making us notice a categorial difference between the two instances of seeing; what exactly the difference may consist in is addressed in remarks to follow.

The second case, Wittgenstein goes on to say, is that of aspect-perception: ‘I observe a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I *see* that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience “noticing an aspect”.’<sup>6</sup> As Wittgenstein makes clear in the remarks that precede it (‘[t]he one man might make an accurate drawing of the two faces, and the other notice in the drawing the likeness which the former did not see’<sup>7</sup>, in addition to the one quoted above), the condition for noticing an aspect does not have to do with differences in the subjects’ ability to see *accurately*; something else is involved here. Visually, the object has

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<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment,’ in his *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, J. Schulte, P. Hacker. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), (hereafter, *PPF*) §111.

<sup>6</sup> *PPF*, §113.

<sup>7</sup> *PPF*, §112.

not changed, he points out; yet, one's impression of it has: One now *sees* it differently. So, again, we may wish to consider what exactly the conditions for perceiving aspects are.

One such condition comes out very clearly in Wittgenstein's discussion of the duck-rabbit Gestalt image, which can be seen as a duck's head or as a rabbit's. However, this image can be shown to one, he says, without her ever seeing it as anything but a rabbit's head, for example. And this inability would be explained not by the inability to see certain properties of the object, but by the inability to notice *relations* between it and other objects. In this case, between the rabbit-duck image and images of ducks. The same holds for seeing a likeness



**Figure 1** The duck-rabbit

between two faces considered above. (Importantly, it is not enough, in the duck-rabbit image case, to have seen such images (or actual ducks) before in order to see it as an image of a duck: as the example of seeing a likeness between the two faces makes clear, one can have their images side by side, and still fail to notice a relation between them, i.e. the respects in which they are alike.)

Certain other features of aspect-perception are also worth mentioning. As we can see from the duck-rabbit example, aspect-perception involves taking certain elements together: if we take the dot we regard as the eye to be looking north-east, we will see the protrusions on the left-hand side as a rabbit's ears, and the little bend on the right as its mouth (and, therefore, the whole thing as a rabbit's head); whereas if we take the eye to be looking westward, we will see the protrusions as a duck's bill (and, therefore, the whole thing as a duck's head).<sup>8</sup> In addition, Severin Schroeder gives a list of aspects in which, Wittgenstein suggests, one can see a triangle (like the one in Figure 2): 'as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing; as standing

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, the artificiality of this purely sensory description of the image; I briefly return to this point below, when discussing the issue of whether or not aspect-perception is, at bottom, interpretation.

on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an overturned object which is meant, for example, to stand on the shorter side of the right angle, as a half parallelogram, etc.’<sup>9</sup>

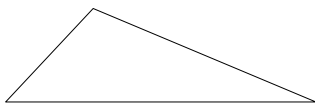


Figure 2 A triangle

Several points follow from this. Certain kinds of aspect-perception require *imagination* (e.g. see a triangle as overturned, as a mountain, etc.), familiarity or *knowledge* (e.g. to see it as a half parallelogram one must know what a parallelogram looks like), and *mastery of concepts* (e.g. seeing it as hanging from its apex presupposes the mastery of the concept of an apex).

Drawing together the observations of the preceding paragraphs we can therefore conclude that aspect-perception, as distinguished from simple perception, involves noticing relations between objects and taking certain elements together, and requires imagination, knowledge, and mastery of concepts. The lack of (any of) these bars one from the experience of noticing certain aspects, i.e. makes one aspect-blind. The significance of this last observation of Wittgenstein’s for my overall argument will become clear in the later chapters. For the moment, however, I would like to draw attention to certain implications of the concept-laden-ness of aspect-perception and the respective possibility of aspect-blindness due to the absence of the mastery of certain concepts.

The possibility of aspect-blindness of this kind struck Wittgenstein as paradoxical, as is clear from the following two sections:

In the triangle I can see now *this* as apex, *that* as base — now *this* as apex, *that* as base. — Clearly the words “Now I am seeing *this* as the apex” cannot so far have any significance for a learner who has only just met the concepts of apex, base, and so on. — But I do not mean this as an empirical proposition.

Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility would one say that he saw it now *this* way, now *that* way.

The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Severin Schroeder, ‘A Tale of Two Problems: Wittgenstein’s Discussion of Aspect Perception,’ in *Mind, Method & Morality*, ed. J. Cottingham & P. Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 353.

But how odd for this to be the logical condition of someone's having such-and-such an *experience*! After all, you don't say that one 'has toothache' only if one is capable of doing such-and-such. — From this it follows that we cannot be dealing with the same concept of experience here. It is a different concept, even though related.<sup>11</sup>

At least two points follow from this. One has to do with mastery of a technique; one condition for ascribing a certain experience (in this case, of the visual variety) to a person is behavioural: she has to demonstrate through her actions (which might be, but usually are not, limited to a verbal explanation) that she knows how to proceed 'with facility'. That is, a logical condition for certain experiences is mastery of complex, language-involving forms of life (a notion I will address in the following section). More importantly for the purposes of the present section, however, we have to consider what Wittgenstein means by saying that we must be dealing with a different, though related, concept of experience here.

I believe that the answer lies in Wittgenstein's observation that 'many of our concepts cross' in the case of aspect-perception.<sup>12</sup> The idea seems to be that the experience of noticing an aspect is not unitary in the traditional philosophical sense (i.e. it seems to involve more than one faculty), unlike, say, that of a toothache (which can be understood as unpleasant sensory experience which you want to stop as soon as possible). Seeing a specific part of a triangle as a base seems to involve not only visual experience but also elements of thought and knowledge (i.e. the conceptual mastery of the relevant kind, the capacity and the knowledge how to proceed, etc., as remarked above).<sup>13</sup> Yet aspect-perception is comparable to simple perception, i.e. what, from the traditional philosophical perspective at least, seems to be a unitary visual experience (e.g. of seeing red) – and, in turn, to other unitary experiences such as having certain sensations (e.g. a toothache) – in the sense that both are still cases of *seeing*, as our ordinary use of the term suggests. The oddity or paradox then disappears.

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<sup>10</sup> PPF, §222.

<sup>11</sup> PPF, §223.

<sup>12</sup> PPF, §245.

<sup>13</sup> This claim is qualified below.



This observation, namely of a non-unitary character of the experience of noticing an aspect, also helps us to counter the objection, which Wittgenstein himself addresses, that aspect-perception, a phenomenon Wittgenstein is evidently making a great deal of, amounts to nothing more than various kinds of interpretation as distinguished from seeing proper. What we really see in the duck-rabbit picture, the objection goes, is a curiously curved line around a dot, and our intellect contributes an extra step by interpreting it to be an image of something specific; in this case, either of a duck's or a rabbit's head, because the image is purposely designed so that both interpretations be possible. Natural though this objection may sound, at least two responses can be derived from Wittgenstein's remarks on the issue.

The first is that this objection is grounded in certain widespread philosophical presuppositions, which, Wittgenstein argues, our ordinary use of language shows to be unwarranted. More precisely, at play here is the empiricist dichotomy between raw sense data and the contribution of our intellectual capacities, and the objector's suggestion amounts to saying that the description of what we perceive in the duck-rabbit image in terms of raw sense data is the direct one, whereas calling it either a rabbit's or a duck's head is an instance of indirect description. In other words, our intellect is here said to be making an *inference* from raw sense data to arrive at a conclusion, i.e. a picture of something definite (and in this case we are equally entitled to each of the two possible conclusions). Wittgenstein's response is to say that if we do indeed make such an inference, we ought to be aware of it: If there is a *direct* visual experience of the duck-rabbit image which accompanies our looking at it, we ought to know it. 'I ought,' Wittgenstein writes, 'to be able to refer to the experience directly, and not only indirectly. (As I can speak of red without necessarily calling it the colour of blood.)'<sup>14</sup>

Wittgenstein is turning the tables here by pointing to the fact that the exclamation 'I see it as a rabbit!', say, is in fact the more direct response to the image, and a description of it in terms of curves and dots is actually the indirect one. Indeed, as Hans-Johann Glock points out,

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<sup>14</sup> PPF, §117.

this puts in doubt the very distinction between interpretation and the raw sensory data: ‘there is no more direct expression of the experience than the report of aspect-perception “I see it *as* a rabbit,” that is, there is no sharp contrast between the “interpretation” and the uninterpreted data.’<sup>15</sup> Glock continues:

[While] it is always possible to describe what one perceives in terms of sounds, or colour and shape, it does not follow that any other description is indirect or inferred. On the contrary, it is easier to describe a person’s face as ‘sad’, ‘radiant’ or ‘bored’ than to describe it in physical terms. We know the *conclusions* of the alleged inference, not its premises. Neural stimuli may feature in a causal explanation of perception and understanding, but are not raw data from which we construct objects (...)<sup>16</sup>

One of the points Glock mentions here, namely the Wittgensteinian suggestion that third-person ascriptions of emotions are really instances of aspect-perception, will be discussed in detail in the later sections; for the moment, however, the point to note is that our ordinary use of language gives no support to the conceptual distinction between interpretation and the uninterpreted data that the empiricist wants to push. The ease of descriptions such as ‘sad’, ‘radiant’, etc., of the exclamation, in the context discussed, ‘Now it’s a rabbit!’, or, for that matter, of descriptions of the triangle as standing on its basis, as overturned, as a mountain, etc., gives us no grounds to say that they are *indirect*. And our being aware of the conclusions and not the premises undermines the suggestion that what we do here is *make inferences*.

Glock also points out that, of course, nothing prevents us from describing what we see in terms of material properties. Artificial and laborious though it is in most cases, perhaps it need not be – for some people at least. Perhaps for those who have undergone extensive training of the relevant kind such descriptions, when presented with certain ‘stimuli’ (such as various images, people, etc.), will come as a natural response. But even then, contrary to what the empiricist would have us believe, this will not, of course, be a case of pure perception.

<sup>15</sup> Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 40 (my italics).

Instead, it will be just another instance of aspect-perception, as Stephen Mulhall points out.<sup>17</sup>

(Wittgenstein's urge to resist such theories and to remove them from philosophical discourse in the first place is another matter.)

The second response as to why aspect-perception cannot be regarded as interpretation, and one that highlights one of the crucial characteristic of it for our purposes, is that aspect-perception is a *state*, which has duration ('See it as a rabbit!', 'Now see it as a duck!') and can be subject to will (as these commands indicate). Interpretation, by contrast, is an *act*, and, as Wittgenstein points out, the ordinary use of the term suggests that it involves formation of hypotheses which are then tested; evidently, nothing of the kind normally happens in the examples discussed.<sup>18</sup> There is an immediacy in our expression of the experience of noticing an aspect ('Now I see it as a rabbit!', 'The triangle has fallen over!'); reports of aspect perception, as Glock points out, are '*avowals*, spontaneous reactions to what we see.'<sup>19</sup> 'The very expression which is also a report of what is seen is here a cry of recognition,' writes Wittgenstein.<sup>20</sup> The significance of this point will become especially clear when I turn to the topic of emotions in the later chapters.

Before I close the present section, one last observation is in order. If we concede the point that interpretation is not what aspect-perception essentially is, can we say anything by way of its *positive* characterisation? As I mentioned above, such experiences seem to be non-unitary (in the way that experiences of simple perception are normally thought to be, by contrast), so can we clearly distinguish and specify its components or elements? Can we say that, despite it not being interpretation, it nevertheless comprises seeing *plus* thinking? This is a temptation Wittgenstein himself admits not being completely immune to:

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<sup>17</sup> Mulhall (op. cit.), 132-3.

<sup>18</sup> PPF, §249.

<sup>19</sup> Glock (op. cit.), 39.

<sup>20</sup> PPF, §145.

Now, when I recognize my acquaintance in a crowd, perhaps after looking in his direction for quite a while — is this a special sort of seeing? Is it a case of both seeing and thinking? Or a fusion of the two — as I would almost like to say?

The question is: *why* does one want to say this?<sup>21</sup>

This implies that such a temptation should be resisted. In my view, this is because, first, ‘many of our concepts cross here,’ as Wittgenstein points out.<sup>22</sup> Second and more importantly – and this also seems to be the answer to the question ‘*why* does one want to say this?’ – giving in to it, as Gary Hagberg suggests, would amount to reaffirming the empiricist dichotomy between the intellectual and the sensory content, the very dichotomy Wittgenstein laboured to resist.

Wittgenstein showed, writes Hagberg, that there is

no sharp delineation between what we are led to call the intellectual content and the sensory content, between thinking and seeing, between mind and eye. One feels here an impulse to use the word ‘suffused’ as a way of reaching for a general formulation of the relation, i.e. the intellectual content suffuses the sensory data in an indissoluble union, but this too should, as Wittgenstein’s inquiries here implicitly demonstrate, be resisted: even if better, the concept of suffusion enforces an implicit bifurcation at a prior state now gotten beyond. The word ‘indissoluble’ does the same, and working in concert they would lead us to picture the thought-suffused perception as a result of a prior assemblage of components of sensory and mental ontologies (...). The grooves are deep.<sup>23</sup>

My own initial characterisation of aspect-perception as simple perception with elements of thought is also somewhat misleading, therefore. Perhaps the most we can really say, by way of a positive characterisation, is indeed that ‘many of our concepts cross here,’ and that we would be hard-pressed to specify where the boundaries of each begin or end. Nevertheless, it will be necessary, in what follows, to revert to this talk of ‘elements’ of aspect-perception given the ubiquity of this dichotomy in contemporary philosophical theories, including theories of emotions; but it should be borne in mind that this will be a deliberate simplification used for critical purposes.

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<sup>21</sup> PPF, §144.

<sup>22</sup> PPF, §245.

<sup>23</sup> Gary Hagberg, *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein and Autobiographical Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

To reiterate the key points of the foregoing discussion, aspect-perception, which is a form of seeing, seems to depend upon what is normally taken to be purely intellectual capacities, namely imagination, knowledge, conceptual mastery, etc., and entails the possibility of aspect-blindness. It is markedly different from what we normally call interpretation and is an immediate, spontaneous reaction, the verbal expression of which resembles a cry of recognition.

## B. Forms of Life and the Emotions

The notion ‘forms of life’ plays an important role in Wittgenstein’s later works. It stresses ‘the intertwining of culture, world-view, and language.’<sup>24</sup> All of these three terms have been central to certain strands of philosophy and cultural anthropology at least since the beginning of the previous century, and, as a result, the implications of this concept of Wittgenstein’s has been subject to various (mis)interpretations, as Glock points out. Questions have been raised regarding the extent to which Wittgenstein was a cultural and/or linguistic relativist, whether Wittgenstein’s work offers a means to solve the problem of radical interpretation, what resemblance it may bear to certain theories in the philosophy of language (e.g. the speech-act theory), whether the term is given a transcendental role in his philosophy or calls for a naturalistic interpretation, etc.<sup>25</sup> These questions are interesting and important, and a thorough expository discussion of the term would probably require addressing many, if not all of them; however, they need not concern us here.<sup>26</sup> My discussion of this multifaceted term in the present section will be limited to two of its aspects, namely the context-embeddedness of our actions and utterances, and the role of mastery of concepts in determining what experiences

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<sup>24</sup> Glock (op. cit.), 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 124-9.

<sup>26</sup> One exception, however, is the relationship between the worldview and certain experiences, which it might enable or prevent – something I will briefly address in Chapter III. But even the discussion of an issue such as this does not strictly require getting into the philosophical debate on the pros and cons of, say, cultural relativism, or deep waters of similar kind, and the remainder of the present chapter will, I hope, suffice to prepare the grounds for it.

might be open to us. And at the focus of discussion, to take a step closer to the central topic of the present essay, will be the emotions.

Let us start with the first. Human action, for Wittgenstein, can be understood or described only in a context. More precisely, as Glock points out, in order to describe it ‘we need to describe not just what “one man is doing *now*, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions,” the “way of living” of which an individual action is part.’<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein writes: ‘[If] I just hear the words “I am afraid” I might be able to *guess* which game is being played here (say on the basis of the tone), but I won’t really know it until I am aware of the context.’<sup>28</sup> Being afraid normally involves the presence, real or imagined, of something that threatens you, a likely possibility that something might happen which you would rather not happen, etc. One might also, however, easily imagine circumstances in which ‘I am afraid’ is said in, e.g., a humorous tone, used as a form of politeness (e.g. before relaying bad news to someone), or even used incompetently (e.g. by someone who has just started to learn English, in a situation which qualifies as paradigmatic for some other emotion (say, excitement, rather than fear)). These paradigmatic scenarios are what Wittgenstein seems to mean, at least in part, by forms of life in the language of emotions or moods. Forms of life seem to refer to certain contextualised behaviour (including our utterances) the motives for which reflect our genuine concerns, as actions generally do ‘in the hurly-burly of our lives.’<sup>29</sup>

One of Wittgenstein’s goals in referring to forms of life when he talks about emotions and moods (e.g. hope, grief, horror)<sup>30</sup> is, of course, to undermine the Cartesian view of sensations as isolable mental events that we recognise through our ‘mind’s eye’. And one of a

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<sup>27</sup> Glock (op. cit.), 128.

<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein cited in Hagberg (op. cit.), 104.

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps one can go even further and say, with Nicholas Gier, that emotions or moods (e.g. anger, melancholy, joy, grief, etc.) actually *are* forms of life (see his ‘Wittgenstein and Heidegger: A Phenomenology of Forms of Life,’ *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 43 (1981): 269-305); however, exploring this option would take us too far afield. This essay, in any case, is concerned with presenting a somewhat different account of emotions, which has the potential to contribute clarity to contemporary philosophical debates on emotions; which, I fear, an account of emotions based on this admittedly vague notion of Wittgenstein’s could hardly be expected to achieve.

<sup>30</sup> PPF, §1-6.

number of ways Wittgenstein attacks this view is by pointing out that emotions and moods are not ‘mere occurrences within the mind, having no essential connection with the world in which we live and act, including the use of language. They are, on the contrary, interwoven with these and could not be supposed to exist in isolation from them.’<sup>31</sup> And it is this context of our actions and utterances that provides the criterion of correctness for third-person ascriptions of emotions (something we can know with a much greater degree of certainty than our lack of access, on the Cartesian picture, to the inner mental states of others would imply).

Wittgenstein’s suggestion that there must be criteria of correctness for the use of words if language is to be a means of communication also helps us make sense of what might be meant by ‘the human form of life’.<sup>32</sup> In the case of many words, we learn ‘the connection between the name and the thing named’<sup>33</sup> by being presented with a sample and told ‘*this* is what we call...’ (e.g. a pencil, colour red, etc.), and, in these cases, it is these samples that serve to show what the correct use is (e.g. we would correct someone who, say, points to a ruler and calls it a pencil by saying he is wrong and showing a sample of the latter). In the case of sensation-terms like pain, we apply the term to others on the basis of familiar behavioural criteria (e.g. crying, certain facial expressions, etc.). And in the case of emotions and moods, as I said above, it is the context of the self-ascription of emotion or behavioural manifestation, such as a face radiant with joy or happiness or scowling with anger, as well as gestures and mien indicating alarm, anger, anxiety, etc., that generally enables us to determine what sort of emotion or mood one is in.<sup>34</sup> (This argument is reinforced by the fact that is also the context that we describe when we try to explain to someone how we felt in or what someone else must have been feeling about this or that in the past.) The existence of such criteria of correctness enables agreement in judgement, in most cases at least, on the use of words, and the human

<sup>31</sup> Oswald Hanfling, *Wittgenstein and the Human Form of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Although Wittgenstein himself does not use this notion, Hanfling makes the case for saying that such a concept can be derived from his remarks in PPF and may be used to explain some of his more puzzling views (see Hanfling (op. cit.), 1-5).

<sup>33</sup> PI, §244.

<sup>34</sup> The issue of behavioural manifestations of emotions will be addressed in more detail in Section C.

form of life, the very meaningfulness of our actions and utterances, is premised on such agreement, Wittgenstein thinks.

It is in this sense that he says ‘The smiling mouth *smiles* only in the human face,’<sup>35</sup> as the following quote makes clear:

I see a picture which represents a smiling face. What do I do if I take the smile now as a kind one, now as malicious? Don’t I often imagine it with a spatial and temporal context of kindness or malice? Thus I might, when looking at the picture, imagine it to be of a smiler smiling down on a child at play, or again on the suffering of an enemy.

This is in no way altered by the fact that I can also take the apparently genial situation and interpret it differently by putting it into a wider context. — If no special circumstances reverse my interpretation, I shall conceive a particular smile as kind, call it a “kind” one, react accordingly.<sup>36</sup>

It is the circumstances, the surroundings that determine what kind of emotion is involved in a given case. And, crucially, certain circumstances are only explicable from the perspective of the forms of life that human beings engage in through using a language (e.g. anger at a subtle verbal insult), being part of a culture (in which certain practices are frowned at and others encouraged, that has certain customs, etc.) and having a certain worldview (e.g. one that welcomes pride at the suffering of an enemy, or includes an omnipresent god that registers one’s every action, causing anxiety when certain temptations arise, etc.).

It is also part of our human form of life, Wittgenstein points out, that emotions and moods occur in certain recognisable patterns in our lives:

“Grief” describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the tapestry of life. If a man’s bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we would not have the characteristic course of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy.<sup>37</sup>

While we can, he continues, feel pain for a split second, we cannot, for such a brief instance of time, be in grief (which is a fact we all know, rather than a suggestion he asks us to consider).

His point here seems to be that it is neither the qualitative nature of the mental event nor the bodily expressions that determine the kind of emotion or mood one has, but the recognisable

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<sup>35</sup> PI, §583.

<sup>36</sup> PI, §539.

<sup>37</sup> PPF, §2.



patterns of their manifestation that make their manifestations understandable to us (it just seems unthinkable to us that the intensity of sorrow caused by the passing away of someone important to one could possibly be ‘packed’ into a split second).

My final point in this section concerns the role of language in forms of life. More precisely, certain linguistic abilities seem prerequisite, according to Wittgenstein, for having certain emotions (as already hinted at in Section A). Wittgenstein writes:

One can imagine an animal angry, fearful, sad, joyful, startled. But hopeful? And why not?

A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe that his master will come the day after tomorrow? — And what can he not do here? — How do I do it? — What answer am I supposed to give to this?

Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the manifestations of hope are modifications of this complicated form of life. (If a concept points to a characteristic of human handwriting, it has no application to beings that do not write.)<sup>38</sup>

Hanoch Ben-Yami offers the following argument to justify Wittgenstein’s suggestion, which Wittgenstein himself unfortunately does not elaborate on, that hope requires mastery of language. Hoping amounts to wishing X to happen in the future, coupled with the awareness that it might not. That is, it involves the concept of negation. And we have no good grounds to believe that animals have anything of the kind. It is language that endows us with it. This is why Wittgenstein says that manifestations of hope are modifications of this complex form of life, a form of life that involves language. Hence we can say that without the mastery of certain concepts, which, in turn, depends on the mastery of language, some experiences are barred from one. (I will return to this issue in Chapter III.)

### C. Aspect-Perception and the Emotions

The discussion of our responses to schematic drawings in Section A helps us make preliminary sense of Wittgenstein’s suggestion that seeing a human smile and recognising it for what it is is really an act of perception: We need not, and in fact do not, interpret the raw data of

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<sup>38</sup> PPF, §1.

configurations of muscles on the face to *infer* that what we see is a smile; such third-person ascription is, rather, akin to the cry of recognition upon seeing, say, a duck's head in the duck-rabbit image. Section B nudges us in the direction of the epistemology of emotions, pointing out that only the context enables us to know what kind of a smile the smile we see is (e.g. it would be a malicious smile at the sight of a suffering enemy, and a benevolent one when one is looking at a playing child).<sup>40</sup> The possibility of knowledge in the case of third-person ascriptions of what is traditionally conceived as mental states in philosophy (e.g. sensations like pain, and, by extension, emotions, moods, etc.) is indeed an issue that preoccupied Wittgenstein throughout his later writings and one that deserves attention in its own right. He showed that attempts to explain how words refer to sensations by postulating inner mental entities are contradictory (the famous Private-Language argument), that a closer look at how sensation-terms are used in ordinary language makes such attempts redundant, and that, contrary to the Cartesian picture, we have firm grounds to believe that knowledge in the third-person ascriptions of sensation-terms is indeed possible and widespread. These arguments and their implications, however, have been widely discussed in the literature<sup>41</sup>, and, although a lot can be made of them in an attempt to both construct a Wittgensteinian account of emotions and shed light on the topic of emotions<sup>42</sup>, they need not concern us here. This is because my aim in this essay is much narrower than to develop a Wittgensteinian account of emotions *per se*; I focus, instead, on the implications of his remarks on aspect-perception for understanding what might constitute emotions in the first-person case. Before I turn to this issue, however, it might be instructive to briefly look at the relationship between aspect-perception and third-person ascriptions of emotions that Wittgenstein himself seems to be hinting at and some of his

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<sup>40</sup> PI, §539.

<sup>41</sup> For a very informative discussion of these issues, see, e.g., Hanfling (op. cit.).

<sup>42</sup> For one lucid account of emotions that does this, see, e.g., Hacker (unpublished draft), Chapter 2.

commentators emphasise.<sup>43</sup> This will help to highlight the contrast between their approaches and the one I develop here.

One of those who suggest that our third-person ascriptions of emotions are instances of aspect-perception is Stephen Mulhall. As we saw in Section A, seeing, say, a rabbit's head in the duck-rabbit image involves noticing relations between the object in the picture and other objects, i.e. noticing the similarities between it and other images or memories of rabbits. Mulhall argues that the same holds for psychological concepts: 'concepts of the inner invoke references and relations that go beyond the bare behaviour exhibited by human beings in just the way that aspect-concepts applied to visual symbols invoke references and relations which are not purely visual.'<sup>44</sup> For example, when we *see* someone as grieving, this is enabled by noticing a relation between the pattern of behaviour of the person in question and patterns of behaviour of others in similar circumstances (as we saw in Section B).

Mulhall also points to the looseness, as opposed to exact similarity, of the patterns we are nevertheless able to see as instances of a particular emotion. Human behaviour, he writes,

exhibits little identity of circumstances, of reactions to given circumstances, or of the exact similarity of future behaviour manifest by those in a given state which might point to a conceptual structure in which such elements were necessarily yoked together. On the other hand, human behaviour *does* involve the sort of rough and approximate regularities which render useful the application of a set of concepts which treat it as falling into a variety of loose patterns that reappear.<sup>45</sup>

This, he argues, is another respect in which perception of psychological states and aspect-perception are akin, because the capacity for treating certain behaviour as a variant of a pattern type resembles the capacity of seeing bare schematic drawings as pictures of rabbits or the triangle as a mountain, etc.: 'both such capacities involve drawing relations of comparison with other examples falling under a certain conceptual dimension or system.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Mulhall (op. cit).

<sup>44</sup> Mulhall (op.cit), 71.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 78.

A comparison between aspect-perception and third-person ascriptions of emotions is also implicit in Peter Hacker's forthcoming book on emotions. He writes:

The emotions of others are not *postulated* as the best explanation of their curious facial contortions and strange movements of arms and hands. For we no more see mere facial contortions and strange movements of hands than we hear mere sounds being emitted from the mouths of others when they speak in a language we understand. We *cannot* hear mere sounds when we listen to what another is saying. So too, we cannot see smiles and laughter, tears and sobbing, as strange grimaces and noises. We do not *postulate* emotions as hidden causes of the manifestation and expression of emotion, we *see* the manifest emotion and hear it in the tones of voice.<sup>47</sup>

His main target here, of course, is the widespread view of emotions as inner mental entities hidden from view for everyone except the person who has them, the existence of which we can only infer from his or her behaviour and utterances. This is a topic this essay is not directly concerned with; the point to note for our purposes, however, is that, for Hacker too, the ascription of emotions to others is as a rule not an instance of interpretation: it does not involve the formation of hypotheses to be tested or inference to the best explanation. The perception of emotions of others, in other words, is often *direct*; 'We know the conclusion of the alleged inference, not its premises,' to repeat Glock's words.

Hacker also points out that although we do not *infer* emotions of others from the behaviour we observe, it is the nevertheless the behaviour that provides us the basis for ascribing emotions to others, and that, crucially, these criteria are defeasible. The tears of disappointment can be mistaken for tears of grief, sincere expressions of love can be taken for lust, etc. due to, among other things, insufficient sensitivity to fine shades of behaviour and/or misunderstanding of the context.<sup>48</sup> His point here, though, is that defeasibility does not undermine the fact that we can be, and often are, certain in our third-person ascriptions of emotions. 'Defeasibility,' Hacker says, 'does not imply defeat, and in the absence of defeating evidence, we can, in many circumstances, be absolutely certain in ascribing an emotion to

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<sup>47</sup> Hacker (op. cit.), 27-8.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 28.

another person. For there are unmistakable manifestations of anger or rage, of sorrow or grief, and of joy or delight.’<sup>49</sup>

This brings us to a distinct but related issue of whether behavioural or physical manifestations of the emotions are conceptually constitutive of them – a possibility Wittgenstein felt the need to consider in his discussion of William James’s theory of emotions. The following brief digression to his criticisms of James’s theory is in order here because, first, this is one of the few places where Wittgenstein himself explicitly addresses the topic of emotions, and, second, it shows that the focus on observation of behavioural and physiological manifestations of emotions in aspect-perception-based third-person ascriptions of them makes this view rather limited in that it ignores the first-person perspective on the context that gives rise to the emotion – a perspective without which emotions are often unintelligible.

Wittgenstein’s criticisms of James’s theory are discussed by Joachim Schulte.<sup>50</sup> James wrote:

My theory (...) is that *bodily changes follow directly the perception of the existing fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*. Common-sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the mental state is not immediately induced by the order, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be.<sup>51</sup>

Now, Wittgenstein says a number of things in response, one of which is to admit the importance of bodily manifestations: ‘if I frown in anger I feel the muscular tension of the frown in my forehead, and if I weep, the sensations around my eyes are obviously part, and an important part, of what I feel.’<sup>52</sup> Yet the key question that preoccupies Wittgenstein here, as Schulte suggests, is whether the connection between statements about emotions and statements

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See his *Experience and Expression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120-34.

<sup>51</sup> James quoted in Schulte (op. cit.), 120.

<sup>52</sup> Wittgenstein, *The Brown Book* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 103.

about their expression is conceptual or empirical. Wittgenstein clearly favours the latter option, as we shall see.

His idea seems to be that our ordinary usage of language of emotions makes it clear that it is the *object* of emotion that forms part of its concept, not the bodily manifestations: ‘Does one say: “Now I feel much better: the feeling in my facial muscles and round about the corners of my mouth is good?” And why does that sound laughable, except, say, when one had felt pain in these parts before?’<sup>53</sup> And although, as Schulte points out, imagining some emotions without their typical bodily accompaniments is difficult if not impossible (e.g. ‘it seems for example quite meaningless to imagine fear without fear-feelings in your heart and your stomach. When one is in the grip of a strong emotion one does say things like “I’m so afraid; I cannot stand this feeling in my stomach any more”,’<sup>54</sup> etc.), it is the object of emotion, that which arouses the feeling, which is frightful, joyful, etc. Wittgenstein seems to be reaffirming this point in the following passage:

The expression ‘This anxiety is frightful!’ is like a groan, a cry. Asked ‘Why do you cry out?’, however – we wouldn’t point to the stomach or the chest, etc. as in the case of pain; rather, perhaps, at what gives us fear.

When anxiety is frightful, and when in anxiety I am conscious of my breathing and of a tension in the muscles of my face – does that mean that I find *these feelings* frightful? Might they not even signify alleviation?<sup>55</sup>

The answer to Wittgenstein’s first question is undoubtedly in the negative. And the possibility he alludes to in the second seems to be that becoming conscious of these bodily feelings might mean that one no longer concentrates on the *actual* object of anxiety, and that this change of focus is precisely what alleviation might consist in, contrary to what James’s insistence on the conceptual inseparability of these physical accompaniments from our emotions would suggest. Thus it seems that crucial to our understanding of what emotions are is what they are *about*.

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<sup>53</sup> Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* i., ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), §454.

<sup>54</sup> Schulte (op. cit.), 127.

<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein quoted in Schulte (op. cit.), 127.

Yet, although these physical and behavioural accompaniments of emotions are, conceptually, not part of them, they are often the only criteria for telling what emotion another person has, says Schulte, with Hacker. And they both point out that such indications are indeterminate. ‘Taken by itself,’ Schulte writes, ‘weeping does not tell you whether the person concerned is crying from joy or grief, jealousy or relief. And the same goes for the other natural expressions, like groaning, trembling, blushing, etc.’<sup>56</sup> Hacker reminds us that the existence of certain unmistakable manifestations of emotions, referred to above, should not overshadow the fact of a ‘constitutional indeterminacy about the emotions and their manifestation.’<sup>57</sup> But even if we cannot talk about absolute certainty in all cases, there is still room to talk of better or worse judgement, Hacker says.<sup>58</sup> And both Schulte and Hacker seem to suggest, ultimately, that it is greater sensitivity to ever finer shades of behaviour that is conducive to better insight into what another person feels: ‘One may learn to look, and come to see what others pass over. One may become sensitive to imponderable evidence, to subtleties of glance, facial expression, gesture and tone of voice.’<sup>59</sup>

If the proposal to treat third-person ascriptions of emotions as cases of aspect-perception is correct, we can say, applying the terminology used above, that better understanding of emotions of others amounts to noticing ever more subtle relations between behaviours in terms of contrast and similarity. The views of Hacker and Schulte thus seem a variety of this proposal.

Yet, by looking at Wittgenstein’s criticisms of James’s theory, we can also see certain limitations of focusing solely on behaviour and physical accompaniments of emotions in our third-person ascriptions of them; or, more precisely, of consigning third-person ascriptions of emotions to observation of these accompaniments. It should come as no surprise that such

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<sup>56</sup> Schulte (op. cit.), 132.

<sup>57</sup> Hacker (op. cit.), 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid; see also Schulte (op. cit.), 133-4.

ascriptions remain, as Hacker and Schulte point out, indeterminate, because, as Wittgenstein argued (and as both Hacker<sup>60</sup> and Schulte<sup>61</sup> agree), behavioural and physical accompaniments are not conceptually constitutive of emotions. Our grasp of what emotional state another person is in would obviously be much better if we had a way of finding out what the emotion in question is *about*, i.e. if we knew the full context in which the emotion was expressed, self-ascribed, or behaviourally/physically manifested.

Sometimes, of course, the full context of the event that gave rise to a certain emotion is right before our eyes (e.g. someone's face becomes contorted with fear at the sight of a snake, or one gets visibly angry at a subtle insult from a colleague, etc.). But often it is not (e.g. one's unease while being among certain acquaintances often has a long history; the same is true of many of our anxieties, cases of envy, attachments, etc.). And in these latter cases we need, in order to get a good grasp of the emotion at hand, to find out the first-person perspective of the situation that, the person in question thinks, gave rise to the emotion he has. It is, after all, the context of our emotions that renders them intelligible (as we saw in Section B, from Wittgenstein's remarks discussed in the present section, and as Hacker reminds us<sup>62</sup>), and often only the person concerned is aware of the full context relevant to the emotion he has.

And the obvious way to find it out is to ask them. This is also why I am sceptical of Hacker's insistence on the 'constitutional indeterminacy' about the emotions and their manifestation. Their manifestation might well be indeterminate, as we saw, but the emotions themselves generally need not be such. Hacker does consider the possibility of asking others what they feel and why, but goes on to say that '[in] some cases we cannot understand another person's feelings even though he tries his best to explain himself to us'<sup>63</sup> (turning, therefore, to

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<sup>60</sup> Hacker (op. cit.), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Schulte (op. cit.), 131.

<sup>62</sup> Hacker (op. cit.), 28.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 29.



the ability to observe fine shades of behaviour and subtle physiological manifestations as the ultimate ground for third-person ascriptions of emotions, as we saw.) He writes:

The constitutional indeterminacy of the emotions, of their depth and authenticity, and of the motives to which they give rise is part of the human condition. It can be the source of mutual misunderstanding that may have tragic consequences. Two people, bound to each other by love, may interpret each other's emotions and emotional responses differently. Where one sincerely avows complete fidelity, the other senses wavering loyalty, where one insists upon undiminished love, the other may apprehend a weakening of fervour, where one honestly avers a certain motive for something said or done, the other sees a different motive. There need be no disagreement between them over the facts of their relationship – but one interprets the manifold nuances of behaviour and attitude one way, and the other another way. There may be no additional data to resolve the misunderstanding – all the facts are given. One person makes a pattern of their emotional life one way, the other another way. There need be no further 'fact of the matter'. Here tragedy lurks in the wings.<sup>64</sup>

I would say, however, that such situations are more of an exception than a rule, and that Hacker overly dramatizes this fact by calling it 'part of the human condition' and, in turn, pointing to observation of behavioural and physiological manifestations as our ultimate grounds. In most cases, learning about the first-person perspective is sufficient for getting a good grasp of what they feel – were this not the case, it would be difficult to see how emotion-terms could be used intelligibly in the first place.

As we saw in the previous section, it is part of the human form of life that the words we use have criteria of correctness which render them meaningful by enabling us to distinguish the correct applications of them from the incorrect ones. And in the case of third-person ascriptions of emotion-terms, to recall, it is the context of the situation that gives rise to emotion, or, more precisely, its fit with the paradigmatic scenarios in which a given emotion normally occurs, that serves as our criteria of correctness, enabling us to determine whether the person uses the emotion-term correctly or not. Anxiety, for example, involves nervousness or unease about something likely to happen, which you would rather did not; fear is something we have when facing a threat of danger or harm; boredom involves weariness towards and lack of interest in what one sees as dull talk or behaviour, etc. etc. (I will give more examples of these

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

paradigmatic scenarios when I turn to Roberts's theory in Chapter III.) If someone, say, uses the term 'anxiety' where 'excitement' is more appropriate, we correct them by pointing to these paradigmatic scenarios. This is why the constitutional indeterminacy Hacker talks about seems more of an exception to me, with the rule being rather the opposite: The very fact that we find emotion terms intelligible implies that in most cases they are applied with a fair degree of determinacy.

I would therefore suggest that the first-person perspective of the context that gives rise to the emotion could be at least as fruitful a source for getting to understand it as are their behavioural and physical manifestations of it, if not more so (what emotions are *about* is, after all, constitutive of them, unlike such accompaniments). And this points to an important limitation of the aspect-perception-based theories discussed thus far: They seem to both allow for and remain content with a higher degree of indeterminacy in third-person ascriptions than we have reason to concede.

In the following chapters I discuss and extend a theory of emotions that is also based on Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception, albeit in a very different way: The phenomenon of aspect-perception will now be used to explain how we construe or understand the context that gives rise to emotion from the first-person perspective, rather than being employed to explain our third-person ascriptions of emotions by observing their behavioural and physiological manifestations. In this my discussion departs from Wittgenstein's own treatment of emotions and some of its more or less direct implications discussed by the authors I looked at above, and turns to application of a selected part of his philosophy to a field he himself did not explicitly apply it to in his writings. I hope to show, nevertheless, that such application is both justified and informative.

## Chapter II. Roberts's Account of Emotions

Roberts proposes to understand emotions, from the first-person perspective, as concern-based construals. The idea is that you construe a given situation, or it impresses you, in a way that some features of it stand out as salient over certain others, and it is these salient features, drawn together, that determine the type of emotion you have. The features that will stand out as salient depend on the concern at play. For example, when your child escapes unscathed a dangerous situation she had put herself in through her carelessness, you are likely to waver between two emotions: anger at her carelessness that could have had tragic consequences and happiness that nothing bad has happened to her and she is now safe; in the first case, the concern at play is the avoidance of danger, while in the second it is her wellbeing more generally.

The way your construal of the situation, and, with it, your emotions, will waver between these two options<sup>65</sup> is very much alike, Roberts suggests, to your shifting perception of the duck-rabbit image as discussed by Wittgenstein. Depending on which elements of the drawing you take together, as I explain above, you see it either as duck's head or as rabbit's. Another similarity between visual aspect-perception and emotions, or construals of this kind, is the immediacy with which you experience both: No interpretative activity need take place for you to notice an aspect; rather, the duck-rabbit image and the situation described in the example above impress or *strike* you in a certain way (in the latter case, as a cause for either anger or happiness), Roberts claims.

In this chapter I flesh out the similarities (and differences) between Wittgenstein's account of aspect-perception and Roberts's account of emotions, and propose that if the

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<sup>65</sup> I discuss the possibility of simultaneous construals in both visual aspect-perception and emotions when I discuss Roberts's proposition (vi) regarding the features of construals and show that the seeming impossibility of simultaneity of seeing the duck-rabbit at the same time as both the picture of a duck *and* of a rabbit does not necessarily undermine our analogy between visual aspect-perception and concern-based construals (which, according to our proposal, are emotions).

application of the former in analysing emotions is justified, then our focus shouldn't be limited to cases of aspect-change (e.g. the duck-rabbit image), as Roberts's seems to be. What we should also explore is the possible application of another feature of aspect-perception, and one that Wittgenstein deems highly important, namely aspect-blindness (e.g. the inability to see a triangle as hanging from its apex). This will prepare the grounds for the discussion of the possibility of emotion blindness, which I turn to in Chapter III.

### A. Concern-Based Construals and Aspect-Perception

One rather straightforward formulation of what the suggestion to understand emotions as concern-based construals amounts to is the following:

The proposal that emotions are concern-based construals is that we address situations, or supposed situations, from the standpoint of some desire, interest, preference, or attachment, and we "see" the situation in some way that impinges on that desire, preference, or attachment (generically, concern).<sup>66</sup>

The word 'see' here is, of course, used in Wittgenstein's aspect-perception sense. It involves noticing a relation between relevant situations (in the same way as seeing the duck-rabbit image as a duck's head depends on familiarity with other images of ducks), and the desire, interest, preference, or attachment in question becomes one of the elements of aspect-perception (in the same way as, say, mastery of the concept of an apex is a crucial element in seeing the triangle as hanging from its apex). Suppose, for example, that you, a beginner in chess, feel proud to have won a game of chess against a professional chess player. What happens here, according to Roberts, is that your winning the game strikes you as similar to paradigmatic situations of pride, i.e. where you have every reason to feel deep satisfaction in your achievement.<sup>67</sup> But the crucial element in your construal of the situation is of course the desire involved: If you had no desire to outperform someone more competent in the game than

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<sup>66</sup> Roberts (op. cit), 284.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 67.

you are and, say, took each occasion to play as a pleasant pastime where winning or losing has no bearing on your self-esteem, no feeling of pride would arise, the argument goes.

Notice also that the two situations, i.e. with the desire present in one and absent in the other, are identical in all respects save the presence/absence of the desire, and yet are *seen* very differently, or impress one very differently. This is akin to seeing the triangle as hanging on its apex or as plain, where the difference consists in mastery/absence of it of the concept of an apex. And because in the triangle case both still are instances of *perception*, as we saw in Chapter I, Section A, we have no *prima facie* reason to think that this is not so in the chess case also.

But there is also one crucial difference between, on the one hand, the cases of aspect-perception discussed by Wittgenstein and examples of aspect-perception at play in third-person ascriptions of emotions discussed in Chapter I, Section C, and, on the other, the way this notion is employed by Roberts. Wittgenstein's own examples are limited to *looking at* schematic drawings, photographs of faces, pictures of landscapes, etc., and aspect-perception-based third-person ascriptions of emotions have to do with *observing* physiological or behavioural accompaniments of emotions. Roberts's concern-based construals, by contrast, need not involve any strictly visual components (though they usually do). In other words, the situation need not be unfolding before your eyes for you to have an emotional response to it – imagination, memory, and fictional narratives can evoke emotional responses just as well. You can be reading, say, a novel and feel deep sympathy for one of the characters; you can feel retrospectively embarrassed when remembering a blunder you made on a certain occasion in the past but did not realise it at the time; you can feel jealous of your spouse solely on account of imagining she is being unfaithful to you when she does not return home at the usual time, etc. Yet, as I hope to show through a discussion of the more specific features of concern-based construals Roberts indicates, the analogy Roberts sees between aspect-perception and emotions is justified despite the lack of emphasis on visual phenomena in the latter.

Below I list some of those features, explaining each and pointing to some of the conclusions of my discussion of Wittgenstein's views in Chapter I that seem to be raising similar points. For purposes of brevity and in order to draw closer parallels between concern-based construals and aspect-perception as Wittgenstein understands it, I will be using my own examples and explanations of those features. This will help us see that concern-based construals are but a variety of the phenomenon of aspect-perception.

(i) *Construals have an immediacy reminiscent of sense perception. They are impressions, ways things appear to the subject; they are experiences and not just judgments or thoughts or beliefs (...).*<sup>68</sup>

Immediacy is a crucial feature of visual aspect-perception, as we saw in Chapter I, Section A. The duck-rabbit image strikes you in one of the two ways it can, rather than you arriving at the conclusion that it is a rabbit's or a duck's head that you see there, as I showed. In this sense, noticing an aspect is an experience rather than activity. Our emotions, Roberts argues, are experiences that have a similar degree of immediacy too. Your feeling proud to have won a game of chess, to return to one of our examples, is normally not a result of drawing inferences about the situation; rather, you *see* things in a certain way and that results in the emotion – generally without any mediation of your reasoning powers.

One may, of course, object that others can persuade you that this victory is a cause for pride (e.g. by saying 'He is a pro and hardly ever loses a game! Outsmarting him would make anyone proud, let alone a beginner. Great job!'), and you can begin to feel it thereby; hence, the argument goes, the immediacy Roberts speaks about, and the lack of mediation of reason, is lost. However, there is a simple way to defuse this objection, and a parallel with Wittgenstein's views on aspect-perception will prove helpful here also. What really happens in this persuasion case, I would say, is not that your emotion *takes longer* to form; rather, a new element is introduced into your construal of the situation, namely the competitive desire or interest in outperforming someone more skilled and experienced: You are talked into believing that this is

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 75.

something that should matter to you. And this doesn't affect the thesis that *once* (or when) the relevant concern is there, your construal of the situation in the way that evokes the emotion is immediate, that your emotion is an experience rather than activity. Similarly, when you have mastered the concept of an apex (and it thus becomes an element in your construal), the triangle *strikes* you as hanging on it; seeing the triangle in this aspect is a state, an experience, and not activity, as I argue above.

(ii) *Though they are impressions, they are not, or not merely, sense impressions, that is, impressions of the sort produced by light hitting the retina, air vibrations exciting the ear drum, and so on.*<sup>70</sup>

Visual aspect-perception, Wittgenstein says, is half perception and half thought<sup>71</sup>, and in this way it is both 'like seeing and not like seeing'<sup>72</sup>; Wittgenstein also speaks, metaphorically, of an 'idea com[ing] into contact, and for a time remain[ing] in contact with the visual perception.'<sup>73</sup> All these claims, as we saw in Chapter I, Section A, should be taken with caution, as their primary purpose is to loosen the grip of the traditional philosophical view (which considers *all* seeing to be dealing with raw sense data exclusively) by pointing to the phenomenon of aspect-perception, which, despite 'inputs' of another kind, is still a type of *seeing*; these claims are *not* an attempt to list the distinct components that comprise aspect-perception. Yet, talking about aspect perception in these terms (i.e. seeing *plus* thought) might, as I said, prove useful for critical purposes, and I will do so in what follows. The key point for now, however, is that if such an 'impure' form of seeing is possible, then the same *could* in principle be true of the construals Roberts talks about. And, as I hope to show in my

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 76. It should be noted that I am not committed to treating simple visual perception (this is a topic I can't satisfactorily address in the present essay due to limitations of space and remain reticent on) in the way described here; the contrast here is not between simple perception and aspect-perception, but rather between aspect-perception and the features simple perception *is claimed to have* by certain philosophical theories. My goal here is to demonstrate that aspect-seeing, which is nevertheless a case of seeing, involves more than simple seeing is claimed to involve; what simple seeing might actually consist in is a separate issue.

<sup>71</sup> PPF, §140.

<sup>72</sup> PPF, §137.

<sup>73</sup> PPF, §211.

explanation of the next feature of construals Roberts identifies, this ‘impurity’ *does* seem to be true of them.

(iii) *They involve an “in terms of” relationship: one thing is perceived in terms of something else. Construals are (...) bringing together a variety of elements in some kind of integration.*<sup>74</sup>

In the duck-rabbit case, as we saw, seeing the image as, say, a duck’s head involves noticing a relation between the image and other images of ducks, or seeing it *in terms of* them. It also involves bringing elements together (the protrusions become the duck’s bill when what we take to be the eye is directed westward, etc.) that integrate into a picture of the duck’s head. In the case of emotions, one sees, to return to one of our examples, a victory in chess against a professional *in terms of* paradigmatic situations of pride. And the elements brought together there include the victory itself, the expertise of your opponent, and the competitive desire to outperform him.

For perhaps a better illustration of bringing elements together, let us consider what happens in another of the examples I introduced above, namely that of retrospective embarrassment. For example, you think back at what you said at some gathering of your colleagues in the past, and suddenly realise that the comment you had made was not, despite appearances, taken as a witty sarcastic remark (which you were pleased with) but was instead seen as an impertinent comment on a recent misfortune, one you hadn’t known about, of your mutual acquaintance. You were pleased with your remark at the time, whereas now you feel embarrassed about it. In the first case, the elements brought together could have been, for example, the relaxed atmosphere at the gathering, the amusement you thought you saw in others’ faces, the need you felt to cheer some of your colleagues up (which you attempted to do and thought you succeeded), etc.; it is the integration of these elements that made you pleased about what you said. In the second, the crucial element is the fact of your acquaintance’s misfortune you hadn’t known about; and what you took to be signs of amusement were in fact

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<sup>74</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 76.



awkward smiles, while the relaxed atmosphere of the gathering becomes something that you probably ruined without being aware of it. Add to this the interest or concern not to commit blunders like this, and you have all the elements for embarrassment.

The ‘impurity’ of construals consists precisely in this in-terms-of relationship between the situation you are in and thoughts (e.g. comparison with paradigmatic scenarios), memories, imagination, knowledge, etc.

(iv) *They are “subjective,” that is, highly dependent on special qualifications of the subject; but some of them can be true or false.*<sup>75</sup>

The subjectivity in visual aspect-perception is limited to cases of aspect-blindness: One person can see, say, the triangle as standing on its base, while another, lacking the mastery of the concept of a base, cannot. And even this, as Roberts points out, is not *sheer* subjectivity: The viewer discovers something *in* the drawing.<sup>76</sup> It should be noted that there are no logical constraints on what one can see the triangle as (Wittgenstein’s list of examples (see Chapter I, Section A) was not intended to be exhaustive); and if one can at all speak of truth and falsity in visual aspect-perception, the only criteria for that could perhaps be the intelligibility of an explanation for seeing the object in that way, as Mulhall points out.<sup>77</sup>

Something very similar seems to be true of emotions too. This is because of the wide variety of elements that can be brought together in your construal of a given situation, as well as your own ‘subjective qualifications’ such as the range and the relative importance of your concerns, your attentiveness to detail, the mood you are in, etc.<sup>78</sup> These latter factors seem to parallel the conditions for aspect-blindness in visual aspect-perception (e.g. conceptual mastery, imagination, knowledge, etc.) I mentioned in Chapter I, Section A. (I will return to the possibility of aspect-blindness in the case of emotions in Section C, Chapter III.) To introduce another example, suppose your opponent ostensibly praises the move you have just made in a

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>77</sup> Mulhall (op. cit.), 135.

<sup>78</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 81.

game of chess. Depending on the context, or, to use the jargon of this section, the elements you bring together in your construal of the situation, his remark can invoke a range of emotions in you. The most obvious of them, of course, is pride (if you have reason to think that he is being sincere and you derive satisfaction from such achievements); but it can also make you angry (he might have been making sarcastic comments throughout the game about each and every move you make and is generally an irritating presumptuous person who has been getting on your nerves for a long time), anxious to win the game (now that you're beginning to take the lead), bemused (because his sarcasm shows he does not really know what he is talking about and is about to fall into the trap you are preparing for him), etc. etc. It is in this sense that we can say that there does not seem to be a logical constraint on the variety of construals of the situation you may have – save for the intelligibility of an explanation you could provide.

Yet there is a sense in which we can talk about truth and falsity of our emotions with respect to the way things are in the world, and in this they seem to differ from the cases of aspect-perception Wittgenstein discusses. It is easy to imagine circumstances in which, say, one's pride, anger, anxiety, bemusement, jealousy, fear, joy, etc. can be unjustified – due to either the facts of the matter of a given situation or one's personality, temperament, etc. However, this difference is insignificant for the purposes of this essay. Whether or not our emotions are true to the way things are, this does not affect the truth of the fact that we *feel* them, and this essay is an attempt to see how they are *formed* in the first place – which is exactly where the implications of Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-perception come in handy, as I try to demonstrate.

(v) *They admit of a focus on one or two of the elements, with the rest of the construct in the "background," and the focus can be quite shifty, producing kaleidoscopic variations on a construal.*<sup>79</sup>

Your focus might shift from the fact that your little daughter is now safe to the fact of her careless behaviour, as we saw above. One of these facts comes to the fore, while the other,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 76.

as well as the remaining details of the situation (e.g. the kind of danger she was facing, what she thought she was doing, what exactly has saved her, etc.) recede into the background of your construal. To get some idea of what the background may consist in visual aspect-perception, consider another Gestalt image, the young lady/old woman picture (Figure 3). The chin of the young lady forms part of the nose of the old woman, the old woman's mouth is the necklace of the young lady, and the young lady's ear is the old woman's eye. Your focus shifts depending on which of these elements you take together, while, in both construals, the coat they seem to be wearing as well as the garment on their heads remain in the background, despite being essential parts of the construal.



**Figure 3** The young lady/old woman illusion.

By ‘kaleidoscopic variations’ Roberts means the wavering between two (or more) possible construals of the situation as a result of the change of focus. Your emotions regarding your little daughter, as we saw, can keep shifting between anger and joy, never really settling on one. The same goes for the young lady/old woman illusion (or the duck-rabbit image).

(vi) *Opposed construals of something tend to exclude each other, but for an adept it is sometimes possible to engage two opposite construals at the same time.*<sup>80</sup>

As we saw in Chapter I, Section C, one cannot keep shifting from, for example, feeling grief to feeling joy with the ticking of the clock, Wittgenstein argues, because grief is a pattern

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

in our life, and not something one can feel for a second. But these also seem to me to be the examples of emotions that exclude each other: You cannot, except in pathological cases, see the same situation in a way that makes you grieve for your loss and at the same time as one to be happy about no matter which elements of it you bring together and take to be salient. Not all emotions, however, are such. You can indeed keep shifting between anger and joy in the way I describe in the previous paragraph; but it also seems possible to feel both of these emotions at the same time, remaining ambivalent between them (cf. the familiar ambivalent love–hate relations between people). The same could be true in visual aspect-perception, Roberts thinks:

After gaining skill in switching between views, one can see the [young lady/old woman] drawing in such a way that neither of the perceptions is stable but whichever one is in force is constantly threatening to degrade into the other, under the other's influence. But along with this phenomenon comes also the possibility of seeing both figures in the drawing at the same time.<sup>81</sup>

Whether we can in fact clearly see both figures in the drawing at the very same time is an empirical question, it seems to me. And it need not concern us here, because even if this turned out not to be possible in visual aspect-perception, this finding wouldn't necessarily undermine our analogy between aspect-perception and the formation of emotions. This is because strict temporal simultaneity is not really at issue when we are talking about opposite emotions (or emotions generally): The situation may strike one in one way, and the next second in the other, with both impressions being equally strong, and, if one is not forced to reflect more and choose between the two, both become *committed to memory* in this way; and I see no reason why, in this case, we couldn't say that the person has two conflicting emotions at the same time, for all intents or purposes.

(vii) *They often, but not always, have an “emotional” character, and the difference between the two kinds of cases is made by the presence of concerns, personal interests, and attachments of the subject for (to) something in the construed situation.*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 76.

Perhaps the clearest example of the emotional character of some cases of visual aspect-perception is seeing a photograph of your loved one, say, from many years ago. Once you notice that this is actually a picture of her, your attitude to the picture, the way it now strikes you, is affected by your attachment to her.<sup>83</sup> Its character now is undeniably emotional. And it wouldn't be such, if it were an old photograph of someone you do not know at all.

Concerns (or attachments, desires, interests, etc.), as we saw, are the necessary 'ingredients' of construals that *are* emotions, on Roberts's view (his proposal, to recall is to understand emotions as *concern-based* construals). It is the presence (or absence) of the relevant concern in your construal that is decisive as to whether or not the construal becomes an emotion or not, as we saw, for example, in the chess victory example discussed above. And the deeper the concern, the stronger emotion (as the example in the previous paragraph illustrates).

(viii) *The language of construal or seeing-as is not native to the experience except in special cases where the experience is taken to be optional or not to bear on truth, or the speaker is denying, doubting, or analyzing the experience.*<sup>84</sup>

The idea is that you wouldn't say you saw someone's facial expression *as* a smile unless you later have reasons to think it might have been something else (say, an involuntary twitch of facial muscles), or are explaining to someone why you responded to it the way you did, and in similar cases. And seeing a face as smiling, let us recall, is still an instance of visual aspect-perception.

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<sup>83</sup> This point is reaffirmed by Wittgenstein in PPF, §113 and §143: the picture of the face *looks* different to you when you recognise whose face it is. This is because, to use the terminology developed here, your attachment is one of the terms of your construal (of the picture) as much as, say, the concept of an apex is a term of your construal of the triangle as hanging from its apex. The emotional character thus seems to me to be indistinguishable from your perception in cases of face recognition (cf. Schroeder (op. cit.), 370; see also PPF, §197, where Wittgenstein says, in contrast to Schroeder, that we view the picture as the very object represented in it, not as mere representation). Moreover, the suggestion that aspect-perception often has emotional character is not undermined by the fact that no emotion need exist towards the either of the two ways of seeing the duck-rabbit; face recognition is as much a case of aspect-perception as the latter; it is actually an example with which Wittgenstein starts-off the discussion of aspect-perception. Hence the analogy between visual aspect-perception and Roberts's construals holds firm.

<sup>84</sup> Roberts (op. cit), 76.

The same is true of the concern-based construals (and, in turn, emotions) Roberts talks about. One doesn't, to be sure, compare in a silent soliloquy the situation one is in with paradigmatic cases of, say, pride, anger, embarrassment, etc. and thereby decide that the situation one is in is of that kind. Similarly, one does not have to call to mind the images of ducks one has seen before with the duck-rabbit image to notice a relation between them; we do not *decide* the relation is close, we do not form hypotheses and interpret what we see; seeing-as, like simple seeing, is a state, not an action, as I argue in Chapter I. But when, for example, we mistake someone's kind remark for impertinent sarcasm and thereby become angry, it does not seem unusual to say, when asked to explain ourselves, that we saw the incident as that in which our anger was justified, that we regarded the remark *as* sarcastic.

This completes my exposition of the similarities between the kind of aspect-perception Wittgenstein directly discusses and the concern-based construals that, Roberts proposes, our emotions are.<sup>85</sup> Both aspect-perception in Wittgenstein's sense and Roberts's concern-based construals involve immediacy of the experience (in Wittgenstein's case, of the visual experience of the image, the way it strikes one; in Roberts's, of the 'perception' of the situation you are in), taking elements together, noticing a relation (in Wittgenstein's case, between the image and other objects; in Roberts's, between the situation and paradigmatic situations of relevant emotions), and a shift of focus that changes your experience (of the visual object in Wittgenstein's case, and of the situation you are in in Roberts's). If the examples of emotions I discuss in this section are representative of a wide-enough range of adult human emotions, and

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<sup>85</sup> Roberts notes, however, that not all emotions are concern-based construals, and that what he offers is an *account* and not a theory of emotions. His proposal to treat emotions as concern-based construals, he says in a Wittgensteinian vein, is meant to be taken as a heuristic paradigm: 'This view is an informative heuristic paradigm that fits and illuminates a vast number of cases and illuminates even the cases that it does not fit, such as the musical emotions (...); it is not a universal theory of emotion. Our thesis is the Wittgensteinian one that while the concept of emotion is coherent, no informative set of properties runs through every instance of the class' (284). Some emotions, like a certain kind of love, do not admit the form of a construal that impinges upon some concern; instead, they *are* concerns. Yet, this *per se* does not deny love of this kind the status of an emotion, nor does it make the concept of emotion incoherent. The vast majority of human emotions, after all, do seem to fit the heuristic paradigm he proposed, as his detailed analysis of a wide range of emotion types shows (see Chapter 2 of his book).

if my analysis of the deep similarities between aspect-perception in Wittgenstein and Roberts's concern-based construals is correct, then we have good grounds for saying that the formation of adult human emotions, from the first-person perspective, is but a case of aspect-perception. For reasons of convenience and clarity, I will continue to use Roberts's jargon in the remainder of this essay and call emotions concern-based construals rather than instances of aspect-perception, but it should be clear by now that the terms are essentially interchangeable.

The reason for my insistence that concern-based construals are really part of the phenomena of aspect-perception, however, is that this points to a possibility of extending Roberts's account in an important respect. Roberts does discuss some features of concern-based construals that Wittgenstein points to in his remarks on aspect-perception (mainly, aspect-change and new aspects 'lighting up' (when things are brought together in new ways)), but he says little to nothing regarding one phenomena Wittgenstein devotes a lot of attention to, namely aspect-blindness. And if the formation of emotions is part of the phenomena of aspect-perception, then we have good reason to explore what aspect-blindness would amount to in their case.

I discuss the possibility of extending Roberts's theory in this way in Chapter III. Before I do this, however, I look at another proposal on Roberts's part, one without which my discussion of his theory would be incomplete, namely that emotions have their *defining propositions*. This discussion will serve two purposes: First, it will give a clearer idea of what I meant by 'paradigmatic scenarios' I kept referring to above; second, it will prepare the grounds for assessment of the role of language generally and linguistic capacities more specifically in the formation of our emotions that, I think, is downplayed by Roberts. In this way, we will be better-positioned to consider what aspect-blindness may amount to in the case of emotions.

## B. Defining Propositions

If we hear that someone is, say, angry, we learn a lot about that person's state of mind even if we do not know what he is angry about, Roberts points out.<sup>86</sup> And this is because, Roberts suggests, we know anger's defining proposition (or paradigmatic scenario of situations that cause this kind of response and what the response normally amounts to). We know, Roberts writes,

that [the subject] construes himself or someone he cares about as *offended* in some important way, that he construes the offender as a *responsible agent* who is *culpable* for the offense and *deserving of some kind of harm*; we know that he would *like to see such harm meted out* to the offender. If we know his emotion is fear or contrition, we know similarly structural things about his state of mind, in virtue of knowing the defining propositions for those emotion types.<sup>87</sup>

He generalises this claim and says that '[to] understand the name of an emotion is to have at least a rough and intuitive grasp of its defining proposition.'<sup>88</sup> He devotes an entire chapter of his book to identify such defining propositions for over fifty emotion types.

The defining proposition for, say, anxiety is proposed to be thus: 'X vaguely presents an aversive possibility of some degree of probability; may X or its aversive consequences, whatever they may be, be avoided'<sup>89</sup>; for remorse, 'It is very important not to do wrong (omit right) in matters like X/Y, and I have blameworthy done X (omitted Y); let me atone for doing X (omitting Y)<sup>90</sup>; for guilt, 'It is very important not to be a bad person and I am a bad person in being blameworthy; let me be free from this stain of blameworthiness'<sup>91</sup>; for awe, 'Greatness of kind Y is important and X exhibits a surpassing greatness of kind Y,'<sup>92</sup> etc.

Some emotions are obviously closely related to one another, and emotion-terms in such cases are sometimes used interchangeably. This seems to be the case with, for example, anxiety

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 270.



and fear. Yet there is a difference of shading between them, and, Roberts says, this difference is real for careful users of English. The aversive possibilities that fear is normally a reaction to are more probable and more defined than in the case of anxiety, Roberts suggests.<sup>93</sup> To illustrate the difference, he offers an example of somebody being anxious about the possibility that his mother died in a plane crash, in contrast to fearing it, and goes on to say that

if our man has heard of no plane crash but just has a vague premonition of disaster connected with his mother's flight, [then] he will not speak of fearing that she has died or of fearing the possibility of her death; he speaks instead about anxiety and probably does not identify the relevant state of affairs so definitely as "her death" but leaves open the description of the possible evil. Or, if he knows that the plane has crashed but construes the likelihood of her having been on it as only remote, he will incline more to speak of anxiety than of fear.<sup>94</sup>

The defining proposition for fear, as opposed to anxiety, then, is 'X presents an aversive possibility of a *significant* degree of probability; may X or its aversive consequences be avoided'<sup>95</sup> (cf. 'some degree of probability' in anxiety, as indicated above). Thus, even though anxiety and fear are closely related emotions, their respective construals are different.

Now, if emotions, as Roberts proposes, *are* concern-based construals, and if the type of emotion we have depends on the construal at play (the form of which is expressed by its defining proposition), then it logically follows that emotions like anxiety and fear, despite their close proximity, are nevertheless emotions of different types, i.e. they are *different emotions*. This point should be borne in mind as it will be of importance in Chapter III (where I return to it). For the moment, however, I would like to raise a few more points regarding Roberts's suggestion that each emotion type has its own defining proposition.

It should be stressed that whether or not these construals will be emotions depends on the strength of the concern involved. Although plane crashes and deaths of innocent people upset many of us, the possibility that they will happen normally do not cause anxiety in us, despite this obviously being an aversive possibility we'd rather be avoided (and thus seemingly

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 195 (my italics).

fitting the defining proposition of anxiety), when we know that none of those dearest to us could have been among the passengers. This is of course because our concern for people we do not know is considerably weaker than for those we love.

Similarly, mundane everyday possibilities where no emotions at all are normally involved might seem to be counterexamples to the proposal to think of emotions in terms of their defining propositions. For example, the fact that my phone battery is getting low (which is an aversive possibility I'd rather avoid) does not normally cause anxiety in me.<sup>96</sup> But this objection can be defused by pointing out that it is easy to imagine circumstances in which the exact same situation, i.e. the phone battery getting low, *does* in fact cause anxiety. This might happen when you know you are likely to receive an important phone call (though are not sure when exactly) and there is no charger around. In other words, here again it is the strength of your concern for something not to happen (in this case, the battery becoming flat) that determines whether the emotion is there or not.

The final issue I would like to mention regarding the defining propositions of emotions concerns their role in the constitution of emotions. As I said in the previous section, the language of seeing-as, according to Roberts, is normally not native to the experience of emotions. We do not explicitly compare the situation we are in with paradigmatic cases of emotions and thereby conclude what is the emotion we have. Something similar is true of defining propositions. Nothing like running such defining propositions in our heads is required in order to experience a given emotion. Instead, these defining propositions should be understood as analytic of emotion types, as their conceptual analysis. This is perhaps most obvious with regard to primitive emotions such as repulsion, the defining proposition of which, according to Roberts, is 'X is repulsive and worthy to be shunned.'<sup>97</sup> Here, in Roberts's words, 'we should not suppose either that these words occur to someone experiencing the emotion in

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<sup>96</sup> I am grateful to Hanoch Ben-Yami for this counterexample.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 254.

this primitive form or that the emotion is formed by a conceptual background made up in crucial part of concepts like *repulsive* and *shun*.<sup>98</sup> Repulsion seems to be an automatic reaction with little or no ‘intellectual content’ (yet, he points out, even here we can see a concern (e.g. to avoid objects of disgust) and a construal (e.g. this object is one of them)).<sup>99</sup>

Now, much of the same must apply to more complex emotions such as hope, pride, despair, etc.; no words running in our heads there either, to be sure. However, it seems to me that Roberts is downplaying the role of language in our emotions by saying that these defining propositions are merely part of their conceptual analysis (e.g. for purposes of classification), and that they might be playing a more important part in our feelings. As we saw in Chapter I, Section B, linguistic capacities or conceptual background, according to Wittgenstein, play an important role in complex emotions. Although no silent soliloquy is needed for us to feel those emotions, it might be that the *capacity* to formulate something like their defining propositions (or at least to explain the emotion terms using such concepts), to express them in language, is necessary in order for those emotions to be part of our emotional repertoire. This is a possibility I discuss in more detail in Chapter III, Section C.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter III. Emotion Blindness

In the previous chapter we saw the phenomena of aspect-change at play in emotions: Our feelings can change, say, from anger to joy depending on which features of the given situation we take to be salient and on how they fit together in our perception of it. But because, as I argue there, we have good reason to think that the formation of emotions, from the first-person perspective, is part of the phenomena of aspect-perception, we should, I proposed, explore what the possibility of aspect-blindness, another crucial feature of aspect-perception, would consist in with regard to emotions and what implications this would have for the account of emotions developed here. This feature occupies an important place in Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-perception, while Roberts, for the most part, remains reticent about it. This chapter is devoted to extending Roberts's account as well as correcting some of the claims he makes, especially those on the relationship between emotions and language. It is by looking at this very relationship, as we shall see, that we can begin to understand how it is possible for a person or culture to be blind to certain emotions. Below I distinguish three types of emotion blindness (or aspect-blindness with regard to emotions): emotion blindness due to differences in concerns, in worldviews, and one conditioned by the lack of linguistic capacities.

### A. Due to Differences in Concerns

Suppose someone's twists and turns in the conversation strike you, a native speaker of English, as quirky, i.e. as slightly odd and unconventional but nevertheless interesting and charming. Your colleague, who is standing right beside the two of you and whose native language is different and contains nothing recognisably similar to this concept, does not initially see that person's way of talking as especially peculiar. So this is an instance where you feel the

emotion and your colleague does not (and, in contrast to some<sup>100</sup>, I do not hesitate to call this response an emotion, rather than merely a judgement or ascription of a character trait (which it also is), because of the immediacy of the response and the element of surprise it contains, both of which are characteristic features of emotions<sup>101</sup>). And what prevents your colleague from feeling this emotion is, I would like to say, his aspect-blindness to certain features of the situation. But let us take a closer look at what happens here and why exactly this might be an instance of aspect-blindness.

The first thing to notice about this example is the immediacy of your perception of the situation, the fact that it *strikes* you in a particular way, while this is not the case with your colleague. Suppose you explain to him why you felt the person's way of talking was quirky; he begins to understand your reasons why the way of talking was both odd and charming, and agrees it might indeed have been such. Then we would say that both of you share the same 'conclusion' about the situation. But, as Mulhall points out, it is not the inability of the person to arrive at the *right* conclusion that constitutes aspect-blindness, but the need to *draw* conclusions in the first place.<sup>102</sup> Hence, if emotions have the immediacy of perception, then aspect-blindness can explain why your colleague, whose judgment is in its content identical to yours but based on inferences rather than aspect-perception, cannot, in contrast to you, be said to feel the emotion in question.

Another crucial difference between your and your colleague's (initial) construals of the situation pertains to the concerns involved. Even if your colleague saw the person's way of talking as mildly strange, he would still *not* have felt the emotion, our thesis holds, because the standard of normalcy is not as high in his culture as it is in yours; any small deviations from the norm, which is itself generally lower there, do not, let us suppose, draw one's attention. The deeper the concern, the stronger the emotion, as I argue in Chapter II, Section A; and the

<sup>100</sup> See, e.g., Hacker (forthcoming), Chapter 1.

<sup>101</sup> See, e.g., Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT press, 2000), Chapter 2.

<sup>102</sup> Mulhall (op. cit.), 87.

absence of it means absence of emotion, which is what seems to be the case here. In the case of emotions, relevant concerns are crucial elements of aspect-perception, as I argue above; and their absence, therefore, results in aspect-blindness. Hence, we have another reason to think that your colleague's lack of emotion is indeed a case of aspect-blindness.

Yet we are still left with one pressing issue, namely what to make of the fact that this emotion is lexicalised in your culture and not in your colleague's. Suppose your colleague happens to be from Lithuania, where they only have an English equivalent for 'strange'; no separate words exist in Lithuanian for what the English would, in their more nuanced way, call quirky, peculiar, odd, wacky, bizarre, outlandish, etc.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps this difference in languages alone could explain why the emotion is in your repertoire and not in his? Roberts warns us, rightly, to resist such a conclusion: 'Even the fact that an emotion is not particularly lexicalized in a given society,' he says, 'does not imply that people in that culture are not subject to that emotion.'<sup>104</sup> To suppose otherwise, according to him, is to fall into the grip of radical nominalism 'that haunts anthropologists' thinking'<sup>105</sup> (the idea behind which is that almost any difference in the consistent usage of an emotion term constitutes a difference of emotion type).

The reason why such a supposition would be a mistake is of course that emotion types, as we saw, reflect our concerns. And, to make his case for the claim that it should be resisted, Roberts proceeds to show that our concerns are often shared across cultures, and that certain emotions, despite not being lexicalised into particular terms, are nevertheless still experienced by being subsumed under other emotion terms with broader application.

Roberts's example is an overlap between *liget*, a complex emotion concept of the Ilongots (a headhunting group in the Philippines) and our concept of anger. 'In some contexts,' he writes,

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<sup>103</sup> Laimantas Jonusys, 'Vertimas Niekada Neprilygs Originalui,' *Literatura ir Menas*, February 8, 2013, <http://literaturairmenas.lt/2013-02-08-nr-3413/539-literatura/822-laimantas-jonusys-vertimas-neprilygs-originalui>.

<sup>104</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 192.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

“*liget*” seems renderable as “anger,” but in others the word is better translated as “passion,” “energy,” “drive,” “impetuosity,” “aspiration,” “vitality,” “firmness,” “intensity,” “enthusiasm,” “desire,” “dissatisfaction,” “inspiration,” “competitiveness,” “ambition,” “perseverance,” “mettle,” “force,” or “valor.” Chili peppers, ginger, violent storms, fire, liquor, and illness all have *liget*. Semen is a concentrated form of it. *Liget* is expressed in the intense activities of a woman in her garden, a man on a hunt or climbing vigorously in the treetops to chop away the foliage that shields the garden from sunlight, or a suitor who approaches boldly the house of the maiden he wishes for a bride. It is expressed, too, in the “hard time” that the girl’s brothers may give the suitor. Very old people lack *liget*, and young unmarried men have it in the greatest abundance. *Liget* is begotten of the “envy” that one gardener has for another whose crop is more abundant, as well as the “envy” that a young bachelor may feel toward successful headhunters of his own age, if he himself has never killed anyone. It is begotten likewise by the grief that ensues upon the death of close kin. And above all, perhaps, *liget* is what drives Ilongots to take human heads, even when they do not do so in revenge.<sup>106</sup>

The usage of *liget* that is very similar to our usage of ‘anger’ is when it refers to perceived insults and offenses against oneself or one’s kin; Ilongots are also interested in determining who is responsible for the offenses that evoked *liget*, just as we are in our anger.<sup>107</sup> This contrasts with the second broad sense of *liget*, which, according to Roberts, can be summarised as that of energy or aspiration.<sup>108</sup> The distinction between these two senses, according to Roberts is implicit in the Ilongot practices. *Liget* in the anger sense, he writes,

is the subject of the important Ilongot practice of oratorical peace negotiation (...); it is *liget* in this sense that raises all the questions about the severity of offenses, the balance or mutuality of offenses, the closeness of kinship or the distance of enmity, the “knowledge” of the offender, and the propriety of propitiatory gifts. By contrast, the *liget* of semen and chilies and women working their fields does not need to be negotiated in such terms because it does not have such rationales.<sup>109</sup>

So although anger itself is not lexicalised in the Ilongot language, it is nevertheless experienced by these people because the term is subsumed under a broader emotion term that encompasses a wider range of objects and cultural practices. And, crucially, this overlap is due to the fact that the concern involved in *liget*-in-the-anger-sense is fundamentally the same as that in our anger: Both are about condemning the perceived offense against something/someone dear to the subject (the existence of such a concern is manifested in the practices mentioned), and

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 211-12.

share the defining proposition, which is ‘S has culpably offended in the important matter of X (action or omission) and is bad (is to some extent an enemy of what is good); I am in a moral position to condemn; S deserves (ought) to be hurt for X; may S be hurt for X.’<sup>110</sup>

So the mere fact that a given emotion is not lexicalised in a particular culture does not entail that that culture will be aspect-blind with regard to that emotion, because of the concerns shared between that culture and the culture in which the emotion *is* lexicalised. On the flip side, however, we might want to ask what happens when both the emotion is not lexicalised *and* the culture in question *does not* share the relevant concerns with the culture in which it is. This is a possibility Roberts ignores. My example above, concerning a quirky way of talking, is one such case. The difference between your reaction to the person’s words and your Lithuanian colleague’s (lack of it) is a difference of concerns, as we saw. And because concerns are crucial elements in our construals, your Lithuanian colleague’s lack of emotional reaction to the situation seems to be a genuine case of aspect-, and, in turn, emotion-blindness.

One might of course object that one’s reaction to what, from the English culture perspective at least, is deemed quirky is just a more subtle variety of reactions to what one sees as strange (a reaction which I would also call, controversially perhaps, emotional *when* it involves being surprised due to the fact that the given object or situation impinges on your concerns, as opposed to dispassionately judging that something is unusual and providing a rationale for such a judgement; and both uses of this term seem to me to be equally common). And therefore, similarly with Roberts’s example, the emotion-term ‘quirky’ seems to be subsumed under that of ‘strange’. The emotion-term ‘strange’ would only encompass a wider range of objects and situations than ‘quirky’ does; and the fact that this latter emotion is not lexicalised in your colleague’s culture would not change the fact that it is in its emotional repertoire.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 204.



In my view, however, this objection is defused by reference, again, to the difference of concerns involved in construing something as strange as opposed to quirky. In the latter case, as I suggest above, the concern at play has to do with a rather high standard of what is considered normal in social situations; the construal in this case involves noticing a slight departure from that standard (which is nevertheless considered charming). By contrast, when we feel something to be strange, the concern at play may, of course, include high standards of what is socially considered normal, but it *need not*. It is a truism that certain concerns prevalent in one culture might simply not exist in another. And if the thesis developed here, with its emphasis on the close relationship between emotions and concerns, is correct, then we could say that even the close lexical proximity of two or more emotion-terms does not guarantee that one emotion is simply a variety of another, the more generic one of them; the difference between them, in other words, can still be a difference in kind, and not merely in degree. One of them may be in the emotional repertoire of a given culture, and the other might not.

So we can qualify Roberts's above claim and say that even though the fact that an emotion is not particularly lexicalized in a given society indeed does not imply that people in that culture are not subject to that emotion, this fact might nevertheless indicate certain things about the society's world-view (in terms of its prevalent concerns), and that, in turn, might show that the society is, after all, not subject to the emotion in question. Roberts overlooks this by ignoring the possibility that a culture in which the emotion is not lexicalised might also *not* share the relevant concerns with the culture in which it is lexicalised.

In Wittgenstein's terminology, the difference between these two cultures is the difference between forms of life each engages in. And the absence of a certain form of life, as we saw in Chapter I, causes aspect-blindness in relevant cases. This point is even clearer when we look at more radical differences between worldviews than what I discuss in the present section. This is what I propose to do in the following one.

## B. Due to Differences in Worldviews

As Robert Paul observes, the Sherpas, a Tibetan Buddhist people living in north-eastern Nepal, have no word or concept that corresponds to our idea of guilt.<sup>111</sup> The difference between their culture and ours, however, goes deeper than that, and is a difference between worldviews. The Sherpa culture serves as a counterexample to Roberts's claim that although a culture might not have in its repertoire an emotion that is not lexicalised in it, its practices might indicate otherwise, because in it the relevant practices simply are not there.<sup>112</sup> And this is due to a rather different worldview from ours. In this section I briefly explore the contrast between the Sherpas' worldview and ours, and try to show, with the help of the account of emotions developed here, why they can be said not only not to have the concept of guilt but also not to *feel* guilt either.

Our concept of guilt, as Roberts observes, is all about blameworthiness; it has to do with aversion to be morally spoilt, and someone who lacks this aversion will not feel guilty.<sup>113</sup> This is only possible, according to Paul, when the conception of time is linear, like ours. It holds that once the event has happened, it cannot 'unhappen': Once the immoral deed has been committed, it becomes permanently inscribed in the wrongdoer's history, and his character is forever morally compromised. Another point to note is that in our culture being *morally* compromised is being compromised not before some other human being, but before something impersonal, such as the omnipresent and omniscient God, or, in the secular versions, the humanity or morality itself.

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<sup>111</sup> Robert A. Paul, 'The Place of the Truth in Sherpa Law and Religion,' *Journal of Anthropological Research* 33:2 (1977), 169-70.

<sup>112</sup> My discussion here relies on the accuracy of Paul's interpretation of Sherpas' cultural practices. Although I failed to find any research that contradicts his observations, it is a known fact that many similar claims have proved mistaken in the history of anthropology due to difficulties in interpretation. Therefore, due to reliance on one source only, the claims I make here are not intended as conclusive but rather as work in progress in need of more research into cultural differences in order to be substantiated.

<sup>113</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 224-5.

For the Sherpas, however, time is cyclical rather than linear. Once a deed is done, it will inevitably have repercussions. This, Paul points out, ‘will occur through no agency human or divine, but simply in accord with a law of the universe similar to Newton's law that every action produces an appropriate reaction.’<sup>114</sup> But the punishment for crimes, he adds, is not absolute; rather, it is a punishment for an appropriate term (i.e. until the negative repercussions bear themselves out).<sup>115</sup> In this way, Roberts says, it resembles not an eternal suffering in hell, but an appropriate prison term.<sup>116</sup> We can therefore say that wrongful deeds, for the Sherpas, are *not* permanently inscribed in the wrongdoer's history, and are, in a limited sense, ‘undone’ once one has suffered the repercussions.

The wrongdoer, in the Sherpa culture, need not punish himself (say, by considering himself morally spoilt, blaming his character), because he knows with certainty that a punishment will come from external sources. What he feels, Paul points out, is not guilt but remorse: He might ‘feel very sorry that he has done what he has done. This may lead him to behave better in the future, or engage in (...) meritorious work – all of which may look like symptoms of guilt, but really have a somewhat different internal dynamic.’<sup>117</sup> Roberts captures this dynamic very well by pointing out that ‘in remorse one construes oneself as *having committed an offense*; in guilt, as one who is *morally spoiled*.’<sup>118</sup>

It becomes clearer why the wrongdoer does not, in their culture, construe oneself as morally compromised when look at what happens in the social realm. The Sherpas believe that the offence is committed not against something abstract, such as humanity, morality itself, or

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<sup>114</sup> Paul (op. cit.), 170.

<sup>115</sup> In our culture, by contrast, the person who has committed a crime is marked as delinquent, as Foucault points out (*Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1991)). His moral status thus becomes permanently compromised, and this status does not change even after he's served his term in prison.

<sup>116</sup> Paul (op. cit.), 170.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 170-1.

<sup>118</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 223. For Roberts's nuanced analysis of differences between guilt and remorse, see pp. 222-5. One of the informative examples he gives is Americans feeling guilty for the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or, I'd add, Germans for the Nazi crimes. They cannot be said to feel remorse, because they haven't personally committed these offenses, but they can, and in fact do, construe their nation, which they are part of, as morally tarnished.

‘the people of Sherpa’ (let alone a divine entity), but against a particular person.<sup>119</sup> And once the wrong has been compensated for in appropriate manner, the source of shame is gone.

‘Instead of permanent guilt which sets one apart as a criminal,’ Paul writes, ‘the operative sanction is shame; the resolution of the conflict, thus, involves the elimination of shame.’<sup>120</sup>

Thus, in this realm it is shame that substitutes for guilt.

Roberts goes on to discuss Sherpa practices surrounding identification of the wrongdoer, his (tacitly) taking responsibility for the wrong deeds, the implementation of punishment, etc., but the conclusion remains that there is no role (as yet),<sup>121</sup> in that culture, for our concept of guilt. In Wittgenstein’s terminology, there is no place, in the Sherpa culture, for language games involving ‘guilt’. Their worldview is such that the form of life they engage in does not involve the concept of guilt, nor its concern to be freed from this blameworthiness, from being morally spoiled.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, on the account developed here, the Sherpas can also be said not to feel guilt: The relevant concern is not there.

This discussion demonstrates that emotional blindness is traceable not only to the differences in concerns, but also to deeper differences, differences in worldviews, which gives rise to them.

### C. Due to Lack of Linguistic Capacities

In Chapter I, Sections A and B, I mentioned the close link between linguistic capacities (which are part of the human form of life) and aspect-perception. One has to have mastered, say, the concept of an apex to *see* the triangle as hanging from its apex. Similarly, to be able to hope one must, as we saw, have mastered the concept of negation, which we can only acquire through language (Chapter I, Section B). The lack of mastery of the relevant concept, in both

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<sup>119</sup> Paul (op. cit.), 171.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>121</sup> See esp. Paul (op. cit.), 179-83.

<sup>122</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 225.

cases, leads to aspect-blindness, we can now say. In Chapter II, Section B, I mention the possibility that Roberts might be downplaying the role of language in our emotions by saying that their defining propositions are merely analytic of emotion types and suggest that although we certainly need not be running those defining propositions in our heads in order to feel the emotions, it might be that the *capacity* to formulate something like them is necessary for some of the complex emotions to be in our emotional repertoire. Here I explore the latter possibility by discussing a few more examples.

In our discussion of defining propositions (Chapter II, Section B), we saw that there is reason to believe that the difference between anxiety and fear, on this account, is also a difference between emotion *types*; this is because, our proposal goes, emotions *are* concern-based construals, and their respective defining propositions (which form the basis of the construal) are different. We can now substantiate this claim by pointing to a further reason for treating these closely related emotions as nevertheless different. Anxiety seems to be dependent on linguistic capacities, while fear need not be.

It seems, in turn, that the very same linguistic capacity is required for both hope and anxiety. Hope, as we saw above, amounts to wishing X to happen, coupled with the awareness that it might not. Anxiety, as Roberts suggested, also involves awareness of some degree of probability (of an aversive even happening, which you wish not to happen). Thus, anxiety seems to involve the concept of negation (if not something more complex) as much as hope does.

Now, Roberts speaks about fear, admittedly, also in terms of probabilities – albeit significant probabilities this time (see Chapter II, Section B). But this is done, I would suggest, for the purposes of generalisation across various kinds of fear adult human beings are capable of feeling: Our fears range from fear of, say, spiders or snakes (something in our immediate present which we see as a direct threat to us, with or without good reason) to fear that, say, the war will start in a matter of days (based on reliable evidence available to us). We can say, if we

like, that we see both situations in terms of significant probabilities (and this, I think, is a fair-enough generalisation), but it is also clear that in the former case there is as little ‘intellectual content’ involved as there is in an animal’s running at the sight of another, say, bigger, animal (which can happen merely out of instinct). I would therefore say that while linguistic capacities, and the concept of negation they endow us with (which, in turn, give us the *capacity* to formulate the relevant defining proposition), seem to be required for us to be able feel anxiety, the same is not true of *all* instances of fear. This is another reason why they can said to be emotions of different types.

Anxiety and hope, it seems, are not the only emotions dependent on our linguistic capacities. Consideration of probabilities, relying as it does on the concept of negation, as well as, more generally, consideration of alternatives seems to be a crucial element in many of our emotions, according to some.<sup>123</sup> This is also implied in defining propositions suggested by Roberts of emotions like regret (‘X (occurrence, non-occurrence, action, omission, state of affairs), which is contrary to my concern(s), might have been otherwise’),<sup>124</sup> disappointment (‘X (occurrence, non-occurrence, action, omission, state of affairs), which I wanted and expected, did not occur (fail to occur) or was not done (omitted) or did not obtain’),<sup>125</sup> despair (‘X (an eventuality), which is of momentous importance to me, cannot be realized’),<sup>126</sup> relief (‘It is important that X be in condition Y; and X is in condition Y, though X was not, or might not have been, or was not known to me to be, in condition Y’),<sup>127</sup> and others. It seems that the capacity to formulate (or understand) something like these defining propositions is a precondition for being able to feel them, because they rely on the concept of negation (that language endows us with) no less than anxiety and hope do.

<sup>123</sup> See, e.g., Ben-Ze’ev (op. cit), 21-3.

<sup>124</sup> Roberts (op. cit.), 241.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 279.

We can therefore say that Roberts does indeed downplay the role of language in our emotions by saying that their defining propositions are merely analytic of their types. Linguistic capacities, which are prerequisite for the capacity to formulate such defining propositions, seem to be necessary in order for some of the complex emotions to be in our emotional repertoire. And their absence (or impairment) is yet another logical cause of emotion blindness with respect to such complex emotions.

# Conclusion

This essay developed a proposal to understand emotions, from the first-person perspective, as a variety of aspect-perception, or, in other words, as ways of seeing. We saw that emotions and the cases of aspect-perception discussed by Wittgenstein share immediacy of perception, and involve taking certain elements together and noticing a relation (between objects in the case of visual aspect-perception, and between situations in the case of emotions), as well as imagination and conceptual mastery. We also saw, by looking at Roberts's account, what one facet of aspect-perception, namely aspect-change amounts to in emotions, also finding at play in emotions another of its facets, namely aspect-blindness and thereby extending Roberts's account. This was done through exploration of the importance of the presence/absence of concerns, and through exploration of the importance of linguistic capacities in the formation of our emotions.

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