Feeling

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In the conceptual field formed by → ***affect*** and → ***emotion***, feeling is the broadest term most notably evading a clear-cut definition. In everyday language, feeling is an umbrella term for all forms of felt experience, including but not limited to the capacity and readiness to feel emotions. In traditional emotion research, two tendencies can be identified. On the one hand, the terms "emotion" and "feeling" are often used interchangeably. On the other hand, when a distinction is introduced, feeling is usually defined as the bodily felt component of an emotional episode. Within the conceptual field opened up by a relational understanding of affect, it is reasonable to understand feeling as the bodily experience dimension of affect, in contrast to emotion which points to its culturally shaped conceptualization. Whereas it is possible to understand affect and emotion solely with reference to their function and as only rudimentarily involving felt experience, feeling necessarily entails an experiential dimension including an irreducible form of self-awareness or self-involvement – a feeling is always experienced by someone and involves an evaluation of one's own situation. However, the focus on experience should not lead us to understand feeling as a "mental state" insulated from social interaction and corporeal embeddedness. Rather, the present entry will outline an understanding of feeling as in itself relational, processual, and interactively embodied – instantiating an affective-intentional orientation in the world, as manifest in → ***affective dispositions*** and → ***affective practices***.

For developing such a working concept of feeling, a Spinoza inspired notion of affect as relational dynamics between bodies can be combined with certain phenomenological approaches offering an understanding of feeling as embodied, relational and situated. Such a view holds that feelings are neither just experiences of the body, nor just experiences of the world. Rather, these are two dimensions of feeling that are phenomenologically inextricable. The idea is that all feelings are bodily, but most of the time, the body is not the object of the feeling. Such a notion of feeling builds on a phenomenological understanding of embodiment – mostly inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty – which understands the body as constitutive for our relatedness to the world and to others. Rather than closing us off from our material and social environment, the body is the scene of embeddedness and connectedness. Although the present article mostly relies on phenomenological sources, the notion of feeling outlined here is closely related to the other core concepts in the conceptual field of affective societies. On the one hand, feeling is tightly linked to affect; rather than insulated "mental states", feelings are interactively instantiated within the dynamics of corporeal affection (→ ***affective resonance***). On the other hand, feeling is tightly linked to emotion; in contrast to sensations, feelings are intentional experiences that pertain to an essentially shareable, culturally modulated, concern-driven engagement with the world. Within the conceptual field formed by affect and emotion, the

notion of feeling has the particular role of uniting bodily affection and intentional world-orientation in a way that entails an experiential dimension with self-involvement.

A brief history of the term feeling

The task of elucidating "feeling" is not only troubled by the various uses of the term in different scientific disciplines and traditions, but maybe even more so by the ambiguity of its everyday usage. The *Oxford English Dictionary* differentiates thirty senses of the noun feeling. The noun is the nominalization of the verb "to feel" for which the *OED* differentiates forty-seven senses. This all points to a wild diversity of meanings. Some order can be achieved, however, when noting that the etymologically primary meaning is related to sensation or touch. Feeling first of all means "the capacity to experience the sense of touch or other bodily sensations", or "a physical sensation or perception (as of touch, heat, cold, pain, motion, etc.) experienced through this capacity". To feel something first and foremost means to touch it or to be touched by it. This etymology is further supported when considering that the English verb "to feel" is derived from the Germanic verb *fühlen*. According to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by the Brothers Grimm, *fühlen* can be traced back to the Old High German "falan", which is related to "folma", meaning palm, that is the inner surface of the hand (compare the Latin "palma" and the Greek "paláme"). This suggests that the oldest sense of *fühlen* is most likely to touch something with one's hands or fingers; a sense preserved in the English verb "to palm". To sum up, the etymology suggests that feeling originally had the sense of being in a bodily relation with external objects, touching them and being touched by them. It is a rather new development, mostly dominant in contemporary analytic philosophy, that the notion of feeling is deprived of any epistemic function and reduced to a bodily sensation that lacks connection to the world and others.

The crucial step towards such a notion of feeling can be displayed with reference to the example of Kant's practical philosophy. Kant held the view that moral judgements are solely based on understanding (*Verstand*) or reason (*Vernunft*). As a consequence, for an individual to fully exercising her autonomy it does not only require her to follow the moral law, it also requires that she does so solely based on the formal principle of it being the right thing to do, and not based on any feeling or desire. Kant claims that moral autonomy can only be achieved by sharply separating oneself from one's inclinations (*Neigungen*). In this paper, I cannot discuss the merits of Kant's practical philosophy. It only serves as an example for the workings of the dichotomy of feeling (*Gefühl*) and understanding (*Verstand*) and its far-reaching consequences for the conceptualization of feeling. Most importantly, such a dichotomy prompts a generalization of all feelings, which tends to encompass the entire domain of felt experiences – from love to toothache – along the lines of bodily sensations. Such generalization has enabled understandings of feeling as deprived of any productive role within a

reasonable engagement with the world, which could grow into crudely prejudiced but widely spread assumptions like the association of feeling with femininity (in contrast to male rationality).

In contrast to the Kantian framework, Spinoza (like Leibniz or Descartes) did not separate feeling from understanding, but rather understood feeling as integral part of understanding. Max Scheler (1973) saw shortcomings in both traditions and attempted to find a solution which combines elements from both. He suggests maintaining the distinction between feeling and understanding, while avoiding the reduction of feelings to sensations. Instead, he conceives of feeling as a unique kind of experience. According to Scheler, feeling discloses a distinct sphere of objects that is concealed for understanding, namely the sphere of value. Thus, in contrast to Kant's formal ethics, Scheler's material value ethics grants feeling a crucial role. Feeling is the vehicle for the experience of value; far from being a bodily sensation without epistemic significance or moral relevance, Scheler places feeling at the core of an evaluative and normative engagement with the world.

For the formulation of his theory, Scheler (1973, 2008) introduces two conceptual differentiations. First, Scheler follows Husserl in pointing out a crucial equivocation of the German term *Gefühl*, which is also present in many English accounts of feeling. This equivocation confuses "feeling acts" (*Gefühlsakte*) with "feeling sensations" (*Gefühlsempfindungen*). The main idea is that "feeling acts" belong to the domain of "intentional experiences" (*intentionale Erlebnisse*), while "feeling sensations" belong to the same class of experiences as sensory perceptions like taste, smell, or touch. This distinction allows for an understanding of sensations as not themselves intentional states – they are not directed at objects or events – but rather as possible contents of intentional states. Let me illuminate this with the example of bodily pain: Bodily pain does not determine the mode in which it is felt; one can suffer from pain, endure it, or enjoy it. This shows that *feeling sensations* are a possible content of intentional states and that various types of *feeling acts* can be directed towards the same *feeling sensation* (i.e. either suffering from, bravely enduring or enjoying one and the same feeling sensation of pain). Sensations are a residuum that can only be experientially detected and causally explained and thus elude the direct grasp of research. In contrast, "feeling acts" are intentional experiences that allow for fulfillment or non-fulfillment as well as for intersubjective understanding and sharing, and thus are open to be studied from a variety of cross-disciplinary perspectives. Second, Scheler makes use of the fact that German has two nominalizations of the verb "to feel". Whereas English only knows the term *feeling*, German presents a distinction between *Fühlen* and *Gefühl*. This enables Scheler to differentiate between *[intentional] feeling* (*Fühlen*), the apprehension of an object or event in light of a value, and *feelings* (*Gefühle*), which he defines as responses to such *feeling* of value. This is yet another distinction than the distinction of "feeling acts" (*Gefühlsakte*) and "feeling sensations" (*Gefühlsempfindungen*), which was explained in the introduction and which Scheler adopted from Husserl (1975). Let me illuminate this with the help of another example. Consider the case in which I

sense that another's remark is offensive, but remain indifferent rather than responding with an appropriate emotion like anger. In such a case, Scheler's distinction allows us to say that I indeed felt the value of the other's remark, although without having the corresponding feeling.

Distinguishing *feeling sensations* (*Gefühlsempfindungen*), *intentional feeling* (*Fühlen*), and *feelings* (*Gefühle*) has a lot of potential for disambiguating the notoriously vague field of feeling-terms (cf. Schloßberger, 2016). *Feeling sensation* signifies sensory experiences that are localized within the body and have the status of pure states without intentionality of their own. *Intentional feeling*, on the other hand, signifies forms of sensing or conceiving that are decisive for an evaluative engagement with the world and others (comparable to → ***emotions***). Following this distinction, it is reasonable to understand *feeling* as the combination of *feeling sensation* and *intentional feeling* in a bodily felt intentional experience. This would suggest that we should see *feeling sensation* and *intentional feeling* as abstractions (obtained by phenomenological analysis) that we normally encounter as elements of *feeling*. Moreover, it suggests a stratification of *feeling* depending on whether *feeling sensation* or *intentional feeling* is predominant (cf. Vendrell Ferran, 2016). It needs to be noted, however, that Scheler's ethics did not gain much traction beyond his immediate successors within the early phenomenological movement. Moreover, his distinction between *feeling*, *feeling sensation* and *intentional feeling* has largely gone unnoticed. The latter is likely due to the fact that it cannot be rendered in English without some linguistic acrobatics that make it sound highly artificial.

Feelings within 20th century emotion research

Most of 20th century research on emotions – at least within philosophy and psychology – was driven by cognitivism about emotions. Most philosophers supporting cognitivism about emotions identify emotions with evaluative judgments (cf. Kenny, 1963; Solomon, 1993). According to this view, emotions are intentional states directed towards objects and events in the world. This view goes hand in hand with the degradation of feelings. The implicit understanding is that feelings are not world-directed at all, but rather experiences of one's own body. Moreover, some cognitivists claim that feelings are not necessary for emotions, and may or may not accompany them. Such a view leads to a deprivation of emotions from any bodily component, transforming them into cognitive states, such as an evaluative judgement, which might be accompanied by conative states, that is, a motivation to act.

Appraisal theories are the leading cognitivist approach in psychology (cf. Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, Schorr and Johnstone, 2001). The main idea is that for an emotion to occur, a stimulus is appraised according a range of cognitive criteria.[1] In contrast to some judgment theorists, appraisal theorist hold

[1] It can be noted that neither judgement theorists nor appraisal theorists claim that these judgments or appraisals need to be deliberate or that an individual even needs to be consciously aware of them.

that the appraisal is necessarily followed by some bodily process. In particular, the distinction between various components of an emotion by some appraisal theorists can be seen as an attempt at reconciling the world-directedness of emotions with their bodily nature. According to this view, an emotion comprises several elements or components, namely cognition, motor expressions, action tendencies, neurological processes and bodily feelings (cf. Scherer, 2005). This theory, however, continues to align feelings with mere sensations. While the world-directedness of an emotion is captured in its cognitive component (the appraisal), the feeling remains reduced to an accompanying bodily sensation.
Cognitivist approaches crucially depend on the dualism between experience of the body and experience of the world, accompanied by a dualism between affectivity and cognition. In contrast to these views, the working concept of "feeling" suggested here is meant to overcome the distinction between bodily affection and cognition by locating the intentionality of an emotion in the bodily experience.

Somatic feedback theories (cf. Damásio, 1994; Prinz, 2004), the other major trend in 20th century emotion research, fare better in this regard, as they claim that patterns of bodily changes are crucial for the intentionality of emotions. The main idea is that an emotion is a mental state detecting certain bodily changes which, in turn, detect changes in the environment.[2] Thus, an emotion represents changes in the environment mediated through bodily changes. However, intentionality is here understood in purely functionalist terms according to which an apparatus (like a thermostat) can just as well be said to be intentional. Paradoxical as it may seem, somatic feedback theories also eliminate feelings from emotions since they separate intentionality – understood here as the detection of environmental changes – from any felt experience.

Feeling as bodily affection and meaningful world-orientation

In this section, I will offer a tentative sketch of a working concept of feeling within the conceptual field of relational affect. According to the perspective I am proposing, feeling is immediately bound to bodies as affecting and being affected (→ ***affect***). At the same time, feeling provides a meaningful orientation within the world (→ ***emotion***). Finally, it implies an irreducible experiential dimension which involves a form of self-relation. In short, feeling is the inextricably intertwining of bodily affection, world-directedness and self-involvement.

Such an understanding of feeling can build on recent trends in the philosophy of emotions. To begin with, Peter Goldie (2000) has advocated a return to a close identification of emotions with feelings. He claims that the separation of emotions from feelings was based on the false premise that feelings are

[2] I follow the terminology of Prinz here. Damásio reverses the meaning of the terms feeling and emotion.

mere bodily states without intentionality. Instead, Goldie argues that certain feelings are also directed towards objects and events in the world. He uses the term "feeling towards" to signify these intentional feelings, distinguishing them from "bodily feeling". Goldie thereby overcomes the dualisms predominant in cognitivist and appraisal theories of emotions; emotions are not merely cognitive appraisals plus a feeling component. He also overcomes the neglect of experience in somatic feedback theories; *feeling towards* is at once bodily felt and directed towards objects and events in the world.

Matthew Ratcliffe (2008, 2014) has radicalized this approach, mainly by dismissing the distinction between *feeling towards* and *bodily feeling*. He defends the view that all feelings are "both feelings of bodily states and at the same time ways of experiencing things outside of the body. World-experience is not distinct from how one's body feels; the two are utterly inextricable" (Ratcliffe, 2008, p. 1). The main idea is that although all feelings are bodily felt, most feelings are not feelings *of* the body. In other words, most feelings do not have the body as their object; even though all feelings are bodily felt in a way that is experientially accessible, most feelings are experiences of something other than the body. When experience works, the body drifts into the background and becomes the transparent medium of experience. In those instances, we encounter our body as a *feeling body*, not as a *felt body*; our feeling body directs us towards events in the world. Even when we become aware of our feeling body, this awareness does not need to imply a transformation of the body into an object and indeed it seldom does.

Ratcliffe continues to argue that there are certain kinds of feelings – including belonging and estrangement, familiarity and unfamiliarity, embeddedness and disembeddedness – that are not concrete emotional episodes, but rather fundamental ways of *finding oneself in the world*. He labels these kinds of experiences "existential feelings", emphasizing that they are at the same time fundamental ways of finding oneself and being oriented in the world. Existential feelings establish both a *sense of reality of the world*, and a *sense of one's belonging to the world*. Slaby and Stephan adopted Ratcliffe's suggestion to overcome another fateful dualism, namely one that separates world-experience and self-experience. Their main claim is that all feelings are at once a disclosure of world and self; they are "an evaluative awareness of which goes hand in hand with a registration of one's existential situation" (Slaby and Stephan, 2008, p. 506). Rather than separating the experience of objects and events in the world from the experience of the self, we need to understand how my evaluation of an event is accompanied by a felt self-evaluation through which I embed myself within a meaningful situation. The term feeling is well-suited to cover this intertwining of world-orientation and self-relation. What we need is an understanding of feeling as *at once feeling towards and bodily (self-)feeling*. Putting "self" in brackets is meant to indicate that (self-)feeling does not need to transform the body into the object of the feeling; rather, (self-)feeling first and foremost takes the form

of a bodily self-awareness constitutive of all felt experiences: all feeling is necessarily experienced as someone's feeling. This pertains to a theme that has a longstanding history within philosophy, ranging from *Selbstgefühl* in German Idealism, via Heidegger's (1996) *Jemeinigkeit* and Sartre's (1966, 1991) *conscience (de) soi* to the Heidelberg School of self-consciousness (cf. Henrich, 1967; Frank, 2002).

Such an understanding of the *feeling body* is at the core of phenomenological accounts of embodiment. Thomas Fuchs, for example, draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2012) notion of *intercorporeality* to develop an account of *interaffectivity*. From a certain perspective, Fuchs comes to a similar conclusion regarding the relationality and reciprocity of affective life as a Spinoza-inspired notion of affect. The claim is that living bodies are connected with each other in such a way that each of them immediately affects others, and is immediately affected by them. Accordingly, affective life cannot be understood separately from its embeddedness within enabling and sustaining social environments.

> The mutual bodily resonance in social encounters, mediated by posture, facial, gestural, and vocal expression, engenders our attunement to others and functions as a carrier of basic interpersonal atmospheres such as warmth, ease, familiarity, and belonging, or in the negative case, coldness, tension, unease, or unfamiliarity. (Fuchs, 2013, p. 222)

This allows Fuchs to strictly oppose an understanding of affectivity in terms of mental states. He states that "affects" (which he uses as an umbrella term for all affective experience) "are not inner states that we experience only individually or that we have to decode in others, but primarily shared states that we experience through mutual intercorporeal affection." (ibid., p. 223) However, this discussion of Fuchs also makes manifest the limitations of a phenomenological approach that exclusively conceives of embodiment in terms of the intercorporeal relations of human beings. To begin with, Fuchs' account of interaffectivity focusses strongly on social relations, while paying less attention to socio-material settings (**→ *affective arrangement***). Moreover, his account of social relations can be charged with blindness regarding the power and normativity inscribed into all such relations. Finally, in terms of the basic ontological premises of the theory, a phenomenological account of embodiment restricts interaffectivity to the domain of sentient beings. In contrast, affect is claimed to constitute a general ontology pertaining to all entities. While I take power, normativity and socio-material settings as important issues that a phenomenological notion of interaffectivity should but able to account for, I consider it plausible to restrict feelings to sentient beings. The hypothesis is that all entities are part of the dynamics of affect, but only sentient beings are capable of experiencing affective dynamics in the form of felt experiences.

Outlook

According to a traditional understanding of the term, feelings seem to constitute a challenge for empirical research. The assumption is that while the emotional states of an individual can be inferred

from the observation of behavioral and physiological indicators, there appears to be no scientific method to measure bodily experience (cf. Scherer, 2005). The aim of this contribution was to show that this assumption is based on a conflation of feelings with feeling sensations. Whereas it is true that feeling sensations are only accessible to the individual undergoing them (I cannot experience another's sensations), feelings are best conceived of as essentially shareable affective-intentional experiences within a meaningful understanding of self and world. However, this does not speak against the corporeality of feelings. Rather, the working concept of feeling outlined here suggests that a feeling is at once bodily felt and intentionally directed towards objects or events in the world, and that this double role can be conceived of in terms of the *feeling body*. Within the conceptual field of affect and emotion, such a notion of feeling emphasizes the experiential dimension involved in dynamics of → **affective resonance** and in the enactment of an → **emotional repertoire**; an experiential dimension that implies self-involvement. Feeling is at once evaluative world-orientation and situational self-awareness. Feeling constitutively is (self-)feeling, a form of bodily (self-)awareness in all experiencing. Although feeling concerns the experiential dimension of individual bodies, it is important to note that the body is here understood as the scene of embeddedness into the world and of connectedness with others. This suggests that feelings are intersubjectively accessible through their relational embodiment and intentionality, and are thus open to be studied from a variety of cross-disciplinary perspectives.

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