

Title:

Gloomy duck or cheerful rabbit?

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## Reply to Ronald de Sousa and Douglas W. Heinrichs

A great deal of Heinrichs' and de Sousa's replies to our paper was dedicated to challenging our use of the gestalt switch analogy to highlight the model of affective dynamics that we put forward in the paper and, regrettably, rather less to the point that we took to be its main contribution to current thinking about how to integrate recent theorizing in the philosophy of the emotions with the understanding of emotional experience that is prevalent in psychotherapeutic approaches. The paper's starting point was the accumulating empirical evidence against the effectiveness of Cognitive Interventions provided primarily by component studies of cognitive-behavioral interventions for anxiety disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder.. We saw psychotherapists reacting responsibly to this evidence by calling for greater investment in Behavioral Interventions. What we did not see anywhere in the literature was a *theoretical explanation* to account for the data. Our main contribution, we believe, was to advance that the perceptual theory of emotions could provide just this missing theoretical explanation.

The rationale that initially led to the development of Cognitive Interventions, we suggested, was a tacit commitment to the judgmental theory of emotions. Our answer to the question of why Cognitive Interventions are less effective when compared with Behavioral Interventions parallels one of the standard objections in the philosophical literature to the judgmental theory of the emotions. This objection is based on the observation that emotions appear to be "modular" or informationally encapsulated. That is to say, because the informational states that emotions presuppose are intuitive or

cognitively primitive, these states are strongly recalcitrant in the face of rational, conscious challenges. This account seemed to us compelling not only because the perceptual theory of emotions predicts the reservations emerging in the evaluation literature about the efficacy of Cognitive Interventions. The perceptual theory also furnishes a response to critics, especially Hayes, Longmore and Worrell, who would claim that the empirical and theoretical limitations of Cognitive Interventions call into question Cognitive Behavioral Therapy's signature aim of helping clients restructure the cognitive content involved in mental disturbances. As long as one assumes the judgmental theory of emotion, the difficult problem remains of having to explain how "non-conceptual" or "non-rational" Behavioral Interventions might alter "conceptual" or "rational" cognitive processes. If, however, one takes on board the more nuanced dual-system conception of cognitive content that comes with the perceptual theory of emotions then the pieces of the puzzle seem to fall into place. Rational processes associated with Cognitive Interventions can alter emotions by, as Heinrichs evocatively puts it, "pounding through the highly modular Intuiting System. Hence this task is difficult and thus likely infrequent". Alternatively, non-rational processes associated with Behavioral Interventions alter the non-conceptual evaluative content involved in emotions. We postulated very tentatively that Behavioral Interventions may be more effective than Cognitive Interventions because the Intuiting System is more likely to respond to the kinds of challenges Behavioral Interventions typically pose.

Quite generally, a fundamental question is how to understand affective dynamics, as illustrated by the case of a depressed person who becomes cheerful again. In the paper, we contrasted two models. According to the first model, what happens is that the

depressed person corrects her evaluative judgments by being argued out of them. We proposed that a better model, which corresponds to the perceptual theory of the emotions, is one according to which affective dynamics involve emotionally perceiving the world differently. Recovery from depression involves a shift from an emotional perception of the world as negative to a more positive emotional perception. We believe that what happens in such cases is usefully understood as analogous to sensory *gestalt switches*, such as when we move from seeing a figure as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit. As we underlined in the paper, one interesting point that the analogy brings out is that in the same way as a variety of factors are likely to influence whether you see the figure as a rabbit or as a duck it is to be expected that a variety of factors are liable to provoke affective *gestalt switches*. In the paper, we mention directing the focus of attention and more generally the different strategies employed which fall under the heading of behavioral interventions, such as exposure, imaginal rehearsal, or mindfulness exercises as promising means of eliciting perspective shifts.

Our proposal is clearly programmatic, but we take it that an investigation of what triggers such changes in perspective should be put high on research agendas. We believe that what is necessary is a significant shift in the way healing and recovery from psychological troubles and disorders have been conceptualized. In particular, the *gestalt switch* analogy was meant to highlight the complexity and multifacetedness of a conception of therapeutic affective dynamics underwritten by the perceptual theory of the emotions. The key point of contrast was with the judgmental theory of the emotions' more linear and mechanistic suppositions about affective dynamics.

Before discussing the main challenges raised by de Sousa and by Heinrichs, we

would like to stress two points. The first is that we do not believe that all psychological pathologies can be understood in terms of affective dynamics. This point could have and perhaps should have been made clearer in the paper. What we claim is that the model we sketch is well suited for the cases in which emotions or more generally affects are crucial. Second, Heinrichs and de Sousa seem to have taken the *gestalt switch* analogy rather more literally than we intended it. What we had in mind was an *analogy*, which we think is fruitful. The fact that there are a number of differences between affective dynamics and sensory dynamics as exhibited in *gestalt switches* does not, as such, tell against our point. In the same way, the fact that there are a number of differences between emotions and sensory perceptions does not, as such, tell against the perceptual account of emotion. It all depends on what the differences are and what they entail with respect to the putative status of emotions as a kind of perception.

Nonetheless, how far the analogy between affective dynamics and sensory *gestalt switches* goes is an interesting question. As de Sousa notes, a feature shared by both sensory and affective *gestalt switches* is that both are involuntary, somewhat unpredictable and not easily monitored by mere belief changes, given the informational encapsulation characteristic of both sensory and affective states. As de Sousa also points out, some sensory *gestalt switches*, such as the one involved in seeing the “dooddle” as a circle with a line or as a Mexican on a bicycle seen from above, are likely to be conceptually driven. However, it would be wrong to believe that this makes for a significant difference from the affective case. Beliefs can have a similar impact on what we feel. When I realize that what I am afraid of is a teddy bear and not a real cub, my fear is likely to disappear in an instant. As this example also makes clear, affective changes

can be rapid. However, as both de Sousa and Heinrichs rightly stress, it is undeniable that affective changes typically extend over a longer period. But again, we do not think that this tells against the analogy. It can take quite a while before one is able to see a figure as an F rather than a G. Maybe this is not plausible in the case of the duck-rabbit figure, but in the old woman/young woman figure, it is not only plausible; it is not infrequent. It is quite possible that different factors explain why this is so in the perceptual and in the affective case; in particular, it is likely that one important factor that influences affective dynamics is that emotions involve important and distinctive physiological changes. However, it should be agreed that nothing so far tells against investigating the analogy further in an attempt to better understand affective dynamics.

As de Sousa also notes, there are cases in which it is difficult to tell whether or not a situation warrants a type of emotion. Is the situation objectively demoralizing or is sadness an erroneous and irrational reaction? In some cases, it is not too difficult to settle this issue. Indeed, it would appear that the case of O. Rex as described by Heinrichs is such a case: his situation certainly appears utterly dreadful. But there are surely many cases in which there is no easy answer to this question. However, when there is little to be done to change a concrete situation, what is open is to see the same situation differently—as a cheerful rabbit, so to speak, rather than as a gloomy duck.