Sartre, James, and the Transformative Power of Emotion

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Abstract: In *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, Sartre highlights how emotions can transform our perspective on the world in ways that might make our situations more bearable when we cannot see an easy or happy way out. The point of this chapter is to spell out and discuss Sartre's theory of emotion as presented in the *Sketch* with two aims in mind. The first is to show that although emotions have the power to transform our perspectives on the world in ways described by Sartre, Sartre is mistaken to think emotions comprise the cognitive transformations in question. The second aim is to show why on one plausible way of thinking about the relationship holding between emotions and the cognitive transformations they help to bring about, emotions turn out to be the very sorts of things that Sartre claims at the outset they are not, namely types of bodily feelings or sensations, a view of emotion that can be accredited to William James.

Introduction

Sartre's *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* published at the outbreak of World War II, offers a theory of emotion that stands in sharp contrast to other theories of emotion popular at the time, including the feeling theory of William James, the behaviourist theory of Pierre Janet, and the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. Sartre finds several faults with other theories and is especially scathing of James's theory. For Sartre the idea that emotions are bodily sensations is far too crude a theory and one that, associating as it does emotions with passive states over which we have no or little control, sits too uneasily with Sartre's existentialist outlook on the world.

Sartre proposes instead that emotions involve transformations to the world as we experience or represent it. To be sure, Sartre does not take emotions to be nothing but types of cognitive transformations. The body also has a part to play in our understanding of emotion, both in relation to purposeful behaviour (fearing an object might involve fleeing the object, for instance) as well as more autonomic bodily activity (for instance, constriction of blood vessels and increased respiration in the case of fear). Indeed, for Sartre the transformational nature of emotion cannot be disentangled from the body and its activity. In Sartre's words: 'during emotion, it is the body which, directed by the consciousness, changes its relationship to the world so that the world should change its qualities'.[1] However, the transformative nature of emotion is what is most distinctive of Sartre's theory of emotion and is that feature of his view that I will be focussing most of my attention on in this chapter.

The point of this chapter is to spell out and discuss Sartre's theory of emotion as presented in the *Sketch* with two aims in mind. The first is to show that although emotions have the power to transform our perspectives on the world in ways described by Sartre, emotions are not the cognitive transformations in question. The second aim is to show why on one plausible way of thinking about the relationship holding between emotions and the cognitive transformations they help to bring about, emotions might be best understood on the sort of model that Sartre is keen to reject from the outset, namely a feeling theory, whether of the Jamesian or non-Jamesian variety.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. In section 1, I spell out some of the main features of Sartre's theory of emotion, features that I explain need to be understood in the context of

Sartre's criticisms of James's feeling theory of emotion. In section 2, I discuss the virtues and weaknesses of Sartre's theory of emotion, with a focus on Sartre's idea that emotions involve a change or transformation to our perspective on the world. Although I think we can learn from Sartre's theory, I say why Sartre's theory is mistaken. In section 3, I take seriously the idea that emotions might nevertheless transform our perspectives on the world. However, I also show why accepting this idea leads us to something like a Jamesian view of emotion. In section 4, I revisit the criticisms Sartre makes of James's theory. One of those criticisms I accept may be a reason to think that the bodily feelings or sensations that make up emotions are not to be construed in quite the way James construes them. But I argue that none of Sartre's criticisms succeed in showing that emotions are not types of bodily feelings or sensations.

1. Sartre's Theory of Emotion

In order to understand Sartre's theory of emotion, we need to understand the criticisms that Sartre makes of James's feeling theory of emotion, since Sartre develops his own theory of emotion against the backdrop of these criticisms. Emotions, James argues, are nothing but feelings or perceptions of bodily changes.[2] As James describes his central idea: 'My thesis is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion'.[3] In the case of fear, for instance, we see a dangerous creature coming towards us (the exciting fact), and as a result of seeing the creature our hearts begin to pound, our breathing increases rapidly, adrenaline rushes through our veins, our palms start to sweat, and our hairs stand on end —where for James our fear is nothing other than the perceptions of these bodily changes.

James is led to his view of emotion on the basis of first-person observation of emotion, as summarised by his well-known subtraction argument for the idea that emotions are nothing but feelings of bodily change:

> If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains…Can one fancy the state of rage and picture no ebullition of it in the chest, no flushing of the face, no dilatation of the nostrils, no clenching of the teeth, no impulse to vigorous action, but in their stead limp muscles, calm breathing, and a placid face? The present writer, for one, certainly cannot. The rage is as completely evaporated as the sensation of its so-called manifestations…[4]

Sartre makes two key criticisms of James's theory of emotion. First, he points out that if emotions are sensations of bodily change then each emotion will have its own unique bodily profile, but Sartre thinks that this is not the case. For instance, Sartre claims that we cannot distinguish between joy and anger according to their bodily modifications, since both emotions involve the same bodily modifications (say, faster respiratory rhythm and increased muscle tone).[5]

Second, Sartre sees in emotion a 'meaning' or 'signification' or 'organised structure', which Sartre thinks cannot be explained on the view that emotions are bodily sensations. Emotion, Sartre tells us, 'is not a pure, ineffable quality like brick-red or the pure feeling of pain — as it would have to be according to James's theory. It has a meaning, it signifies something for my psychic life'.[6] For Sartre emotion has a 'meaning' or 'signifies' in the sense of being

purposeful or directed at a goal or end — and which, if true, supports the idea that emotions are to be modelled on actions or behaviours, rather than bodily sensations, mental phenomena that we merely suffer, and which relate us to the body and nothing else.

Central to the theory that Sartre offers in place of James's feeling theory is the idea of emotions being a type of behaviour we enact in order to elude a difficulty or obstacle.[7] Thus emotions, Sartre tells us, 'represent, each of them, a different way of eluding a difficulty, a particular way of escape, a special trick'.[8] This turns out to be the idea that when having an emotion, we seek to transform the world in ways that will make our situations more bearable when we cannot see an easy or happy way out. Sartre spells this idea out in the following passages:

> [Emotion] is a transformation of the world. When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic.[9]

> The impossibility of finding a solution…is apprehended objectively, as a quality of the world. This serves to motivate the new unreflective consciousness which now grasps the world differently, under a new aspect, and imposes a new behaviour - through which that aspect is grasped - and this again serves as hyle for the new intention. But emotional conduct is not on the same plane as other kinds of behaviour; it is not effectual. Its aim is not really to act upon the object as it is, by the interpolation of particular means. Emotional behaviour seeks by itself, and without modifying the structure of the object, to confer another quality upon it, a lesser existence or a lesser presence (or a greater existence, etc.).[10]

Sartre illustrates his theory of emotion early on with the example of reaching for some grapes. On realising the grapes that we desire are beyond our reach, we feel frustrated and as a result project upon the grapes the property of being too green, a type of 'conjuring' act that promises to resolve the difficulty or conflict that we are facing, as well as one that characterises the disrelish or irritation we feel. Sartre writes:

> They presented themselves at first as 'ready for gathering'; but this attractive quality soon becomes intolerable when the potentiality cannot be actualized. The disagreeable tension becomes, in its turn, a motive for seeing another quality in those grapes: their being 'too green', which will resolve the conflict and put an end to the tension. Only, I cannot confer this quality upon the grapes chemically. So I seize upon the tartness of grapes that are too green by putting on the behaviour of disrelish. I confer the required quality upon the grapes magically.[11]

Of course, our projecting upon the grapes the property of being too green or sour will in reality make no difference to the actual colour or chemical constitution of the grapes. Our magically bestowing certain qualities upon objects will for us always be nothing more than a sleight of hand, one that can only ever result in self-deception. In reality, then, it is the world as we experience or represent it that is reconfigured in emotion, not the world in and of itself. Nevertheless, our projecting upon objects certain properties may still serve a more limited purpose for us in so far as it can give us place of a psychological refuge in relation to the intolerable situations that we find ourselves in.

The idea that emotions comprise transformations to the world as we experience it captures for Sartre as well the sense in which emotions as a form of consciousness directed at the world, constitute a type of non-reflective awareness of the world or a 'specific manner of apprehending the world'.[12] My disrelish at being unable to reach the grapes constitutes a form of awareness of the grapes, an awareness that for Sartre involves my projecting upon the grapes the property of being too green. For Sartre this idea of emotions constituting a type of awareness is intimately tied up with his comments about emotions having a 'meaning' or 'signification', an aim or goal-oriented nature. For our emotions to be goal-oriented in the way that Sartre thinks they are (for instance, for our disrelish to aim at transforming in some way the grapes that we cannot pick) is for us to apprehend the objects of emotions in certain ways (for instance, it is for us to apprehend the grapes as being too tart or green).

Sartre has other interesting things to say about emotion. For instance, as the passages quoted earlier illustrate, Sartre thinks that emotions take the form of overt physical behaviours. Our conferring onto the grapes the property of being too green takes the form of our 'putting on the behaviour of disrelish'. Or to take another example, our denying existence to a ferocious beast that is threatening us (a type of cognitive act that Sartre thinks characterises fear) takes the form of the physical act of fainting. It might take also the form of fleeing the beast, since for Sartre fleeing is itself a way of conferring a lesser existence upon something. Moreover, Sartre thinks that emotions involve or are accompanied by physiological changes, beatings of the heart and visceral stirrings, for instance. Indeed, for Sartre physiological changes provide emotion with its weightiness or substance, without which emotional behaviour would be play-acting.[13] Nevertheless, for Sartre emotion's transformational nature seems to constitute the real essence or form of emotion, that which makes emotion the distinctive psychological kind that it is.

In holding that emotions are transformational in the sense of involving a change to one's perspective on the world, Sartre can be seen to be defending a representational theory of emotion. But Sartre's representational theory of emotion is not one that associates emotions with mere appearances or imaginings. This is because Sartre claims that in the case of genuine emotion the realities that we create for ourselves when undergoing the emotion are ones that we wholeheartedly endorse or believe in and not merely imagine or entertain as being true. Sartre writes:

> [E]motion is a phenomenon of belief. Consciousness does not limit itself to the projection of affective meanings upon the world around it; it lives the new world it has thereby constituted — lives it directly, commits itself to it, and suffers from the qualities that the concomitant behaviour has outlined.[14]

Sartre's theory, then, is a fully-fledged cognitive theory of emotion. That being said, Sartre's cognitive theory is unlike many other cognitive theories of emotion, in so far that Sartre takes emotions to be mental states that we might associate with a kind of wishful thinking, beliefs that we form to help us deal with tricky situations. We realise that we cannot reach the grapes in front of us and given the intolerability of that situation are spurred on instead into projecting upon the grapes the property of being sour, a type of cognitive act that leaves us in a better place psychologically and potentially one that enables us to continue on our way. We see a ferocious beast heading towards us and realising that we lack the means to defend ourselves (such as climbing a tree or shooting the beast dead) are motivated instead into thinking that the beast does not exist, a way of thinking that provides us with some sort of immediate psychological place of refuge in a situation that would otherwise be intolerable.

It follows that Sartre takes emotions to be a species of false belief, mental representations that need have no basis in reality but arise solely in order to help us to deal with or find bearable difficult situations for which there is no straightforward solution. In holding that emotions are false beliefs, Sartre's theory stands in sharp contrast to many modern-day representational theories of emotion, which take emotions to be mental states that disclose or at least promise to disclose important truths to us, that some object is dangerous or is to be avoided, for instance.[1516]

2. An Evaluation of Sartre's Theory of Emotion

Is Sartre's theory of emotion credible? I do not think so, but before explaining why, a few positive remarks might be made. To begin with, Sartre's theory can be viewed as a precursor to many modern day emotion theories that associate emotions with beliefs or other kinds of mental representations, such as perceptual-like states.[17] Moreover, the types of considerations motivating Sartre's cognitive theory of emotion — including those relating to the need for a theory of emotion to explain emotion's outward facing nature along with its 'meaning' or 'signification' — are much the same sorts of considerations that have proven significant for many contemporary representational theorists of emotion.

But Sartre's theory of emotion is important not only for helping to pave the way for theories of emotion that followed Sartre, and which are popular today. Sartre's theory is bold and interesting and contains important insights of its own. In particular, it is plausible to suppose that emotions may sometimes be accompanied by the kinds of cognitive transformations that Sartre speaks about. For instance, when terrified by a threatening object we do sometimes seem to engage in acts of wishful thinking in the form of projecting upon the object properties that make the object less threatening to us. And plausibly our projecting these qualities upon objects might serve a valuable psychological role by making our situations more bearable for us.

The point is worth underlining, since in our excessively rational society false beliefs are often associated with poor mental health, delusions or ways of thinking that need correcting by therapy or medication. Sartre's theory of emotion suggests that this idea might be mistaken or at least needs qualification. False beliefs and the emotions accompanying those beliefs may sometimes discharge an important psychological role. Of course, that role is limited. As Sartre points out when discussing the person who faints when confronted by a wild animal, no behaviour could seem worse adapted than that.[18] But, given that Sartre is talking principally about situations where engaging in wishful thinking might be the only option left available to us (we cannot escape the creature and it will surely attack and defeat us), then we might take the view that in these situations, our engaging in wishful thinking promises to provide us with an overall net benefit and certainly more benefit than if we do nothing at all.

Much less satisfactory, however, is the way that Sartre views the relationship holding between emotions and the cognitive transformations. Sartre's idea, as we have seen, is that emotions just are or involve the cognitive transformations, that to undergo an emotion is to reconfigure the world as we experience or represent it, to see the grapes as being sour or to deny existence to the savage creature that threatens us, for instance. But that emotions cannot be the cognitive transformations, in whole or in part, is supported by the following two considerations.

The first is that we can undergo emotions of different types without the cognitive transformations that Sartre associates with emotions of those types. True, when we undergo an emotion, we might sometimes be led to form a belief that helps us deal with an intolerable or hopeless situation that we find ourselves in. But this need not always be the case. Indeed, on many occasions when undergoing an emotion, we do not seem to be faced with impossible situations of any kind, and therefore it is implausible to suppose that emotions comprise or involve cognitive transformations that would help us to elude or come to terms with such situations.

The point is especially true of so-called positive emotions, such as joy and pleasure, which we often undergo when not facing an obstacle or difficulty of any kind. To be sure, Sartre thinks that his theory applies to such emotions. He claims that joy comes about when we cannot immediately possess the thing that we desire.[19] But even supposing joy is sometimes undergone in the face of a difficulty or when a desire is frustrated, joy is not normally occasioned in this way. Joy is much more commonly undergone when desires are satisfied. Therefore, it is implausible to suppose that joy is to be understood as a cognitive transformation that is enacted in response to a difficulty.[20]

However, the point is true also with respect to negative emotions, such as anger and fear. Recall that for Sartre emotions are behaviours of defeat, cognitive acts that we engage in when we realise our situations are hopeless. But although emotions such as fear and anger are often undergone when facing a challenge or difficulty, these emotions need not always be linked to behaviours of defeat and their associated cognitions. Indeed, fear and anger often function to enable us to take effective action, thereby helping us to evade or mitigate the challenges that we face.[21] For instance, fear can focus attention on what needs to be done and motivate adaptive behaviour. Where emotions play such a function, behaviours of defeat and the associated representations seem nowhere in the vicinity. But if fear and anger can be undergone without the cognitive transformations Sartre associates with these emotions, then such transformations cannot be part of our understanding of fear and anger.

The second consideration that speaks against Sartre's theory of emotion is that Sartre's theory implies that the emotion and the cognitive transformation are formed at one and the same time. But anecdotal evidence intimates that this is mistaken, that in fact the emotion comes before the cognitive transformation and might in some way be responsible for the cognitive transformation. We are led or motivated to suppress in thought the object threatening us *because* the object terrifies us. We are led or motivated to confer upon the grapes the quality of being sour *because* we feel tense on realising that we are unable to reach the grapes.

This is hinted at even by some of Sartre's own remarks when describing cases that he takes to illustrate his theory. When describing the grapes example, Sartre tells us that prior to the representation of the grapes being too green is a 'disagreeable tension [which] becomes, in its turn, a motive for seeing another quality in those grapes'.[22] But what is this 'disagreeable tension' to which Sartre alludes and which becomes 'a motivate for seeing another quality in [the] grapes' other than an emotion or affective state of some kind, a state of frustration or irritation, for instance, one triggered by the realisation that the grapes cannot be reached?

And this is what Sartre writes about the fear case:

> I see a ferocious beast coming towards me: my legs give way under me, my heart beats more feebly, I turn pale, fall down and faint away. No conduct could seem

> worse adapted to the danger than this, which leaves me defenceless. And nevertheless it is a behaviour of escape; the fainting away is a refuge. But let no one suppose that it is a refuge for me, that I am trying to save myself or to see no more of the ferocious beast. I have not come out of the nonreflective plane: but, being unable to escape the danger by normal means and deterministic procedures, I have denied existence to it. I have tried to annihilate it. The urgency of the danger was the motive for this attempt to annihilate it, which called for magical behaviour.[23]

But again, what is Sartre referring to when he talks about the 'urgency' of the danger? 'Urgency' here speaks of an *emotive or affective* quality, one that becomes a motive for the attempt to annihilate in thought the ferocious beast. However, that emotive quality as described by Sartre in this passage is not the cognitive act to which Sartre alludes and associates with the emotion of fear, the annihilation in thought of the object threatening us. Rather it is the source of the cognitive act, perhaps the thing issuing in a demand for that act.[24]

3. Emotions as Possessing Transformative Powers

Although Sartre is mistaken to think that emotions are themselves the cognitive transformations that he associates with the emotions, left open, as we have just seen, is the possibility that emotions have the power to bring about such cognitive transformations. Indeed, talk of emotional 'incantation' and 'transformation' in the *Sketch* might even be reconstrued in that direction, namely in the direction of emotions having transformative powers. According to this alternative thought, then, although to feel frightened (say) is not to suppress in thought the object that is threatening us, nevertheless it is to undergo a mental state that might sometimes succeed in bringing about the suppression in thought of the object that is threatening us.

This idea promises to retain what is interesting and insightful about Sartre's theory of emotion, while at the same time face none of the criticisms raised to Sartre's own way of conceptualizing emotion. Even if an emotion can help bring about a belief that we might associate with a kind of wishful thinking, the emotion need not always bring about the formation of such a belief. Consequently, we can undergo emotions without having the kinds of mental representations that Sartre associates with the emotions. Also, thinking of emotions as sometimes possessing the powers to help transform the world as we represent it promises to get the temporal ordering right. If emotions have the power to change the world as we represent it, then emotions come before the changes in representation.

But what might emotions' transformative powers consist in? And what might those powers tell us about the nature of emotion? In answer to the first question, I argue elsewhere that emotions serve as categorical bases for our cognitive dispositions, our being disposed to attend to something in thought, for instance, or our being disposed to form a belief in the light of supporting evidence.[25] This claim builds on the idea that dispositional properties have categorical bases, properties in virtue of which objects are disposed to behave in certain ways. For instance, a vase is disposed to shatter when struck in virtue of the vase's molecular structure, the way the vase's constituent molecules are arranged. The idea then goes that what is true of vases is true of human beings and how we are disposed or motivated to behave. We too will have properties that ground our dispositions to thought and behaviour. And I submit that emotions are those things or properties of ours in virtue of which we are disposed to behave and think in the ways that we do.

Sartre identifies emotions with cognitive transformations and his examples are supposed to illustrate the idea, but the alternative picture being offered here supports a different way of thinking about Sartre's examples. Instead of viewing emotions as cognitive transformative acts, we are to view them as things that dispose us to such acts. For example, we respond to the wild creature coming towards us with fear. Normally that emotion might motivate us to behave in a way that keeps us physically safe. However, in the situation at hand we realise that we cannot behave in any such way, and as a result our fear disposes us instead into thinking that the creature does not exist.

Now, suppose this alternative way of thinking about emotions and the cognitive transformations that Sartre associates with emotions is correct. Does construing things in this way tell us anything about the nature of emotion, about the kinds of things that emotions are? I think construing things in the way suggested points to the view of emotions being mental states that bear no essential relation to the outside world. This is because categorical bases are normally conceived of as being intrinsic, non-relational properties of objects, properties in virtue of which objects bear an important subset of their relational properties, including their dispositional properties. The atomic structure of a vase bears no essential relation to anything external to the vase, unlike the dispositional profile of a vase — the vase's disposition to break in the event of being struck — which refers to things external to the vase, namely a state of affairs involving the vase breaking in the event of being struck.[26]

So, the question is: what sort of mental states must emotions be to satisfy this requirement for intrinsicness or non-relationality? Clearly not mental representations, such as beliefs and perceptions, as such states relate their bearers to things separate from themselves. My belief that Paris is the capital of France relates me to Paris and Paris being the capital of France. Also ruled out are desires which make necessary reference to the things desired. For instance, my desire to drink water relates me to a possible state of affairs involving my drinking water.[27]

But that just seems to leave what are commonly referred to as pure feelings ('original existences' as Hume calls them), qualitative states that make no reference to anything external to themselves. On this picture, emotions dispose us to certain behaviours in virtue of their being feelings, in virtue of their felt properties. And that idea seems to be borne out anecdotally. First person experience attests to the idea that fear disposes us to behave in certain ways (say to flee or suppress in thought an object that is threatening us) in virtue of fear's edgy quality, and anger motivates us to action (say to attack an adversary) in virtue of anger's incensed or hot-headed quality.

Emotions then plausibly motivate or dispose us to cognitive and behavioural acts, including the cognitive transformations involved in wishful thinking, in virtue of how they feel. But this lends support to a feeling theory of some kind. Of course, left open is the question of what sorts of feelings emotions might be, as to whether the feelings are to be construed in the way William James construes them or in ways other philosophers have construed them,[28] and we return to that issue a little later. Nevertheless, emotions serving as those properties of ours that motivate or dispose us to behaviour and thought supports the idea of emotions being feelings and not some other kind of mental state.

Of course, this might all seem rather disappointing news for how Sartre thinks about emotion. Emotions turn out to be the very kind of things that Sartre insists they are not. With that said,

acknowledge that it is through recognising Sartre's insight about the transformative power of emotion and changing how we understand this insight (understanding emotions as causing the transformations, rather than constituting the transformations), that we come to endorse a feeling theory. In that regard, Sartre's theory of emotion helps to advance our understanding of emotion, even if we end up disagreeing with much of what Sartre says about the emotions.

4. Sartre's Criticisms of James's Feeling Theory of Emotion

Early on in the chapter we saw that Sartre's dissatisfaction with James's feeling theory of emotion led him to a radically different theory, according to which emotions are not foremost sensations or feelings but cognitive transformations. But we have seen that Sartre's theory falls down in crucial respects. Although emotions might have the power to change how we represent the world as being, emotions are not the cognitive transformations that they help bring about. And then when we probe deeper, into the kinds of transformative powers emotions possess, we come to see that emotions might be best understood on the very model that Sartre is keen to reject and improve on, namely a feeling theory of emotion, whether of the Jamesian or non-Jamesian variety.

Still, this leaves unanswered Sartre's criticisms of James's feeling theory of emotion. If we are to justify finding in favour of James or a feeling theorist and against Sartre, then something needs to be said in response to Sartre's criticisms of James. Let us, then, return to those criticisms, with view to evaluating their strength. Does Sartre succeed in showing that emotions are not types of bodily feelings? I think the answer is negative.

To begin with, consider Sartre's complaint that different emotions — Sartre gives the example of joy and anger — are associated with the same bodily modifications. In fact, the empirical evidence seems inconclusive regarding whether different emotions have similar physiological profiles.[29] But whatever the truth turns out to be on that, emotions clearly differ with respect to how they feel. For instance, joy has an agreeable hedonic tone and a certain lightness to it, whereas anger has an irritable and negative hedonic tone. Joy and anger differ very much with respect to their felt qualities. And likewise, for other emotions: consider the edginess that characterises fear and the heavy-heartedness distinctive of sorrow, for instance.[30]

Consequently, if emotions do have similar physiological profiles, then that could give us reason only to think that emotional feelings are not to be described in the way James describes them. If emotions differ with respect to how they feel (as they plainly do) but this could not be the case if emotions are perceptions of bodily changes (say because different emotions have the same bodily signatures), then it follows only that emotional feelings are not feelings or perceptions of bodily changes. And, indeed, I argue elsewhere that the Jamesian model is not the only or best model for how to think about the bodily feelings that make up the emotions.[31]

Next consider Sartre's complaint that James's feeling theory cannot explain how emotions possess a 'meaning' or 'signification', by which Sartre means that emotions are a form of purposive or goal-oriented behaviour. But here I think that Sartre misdescribes the experience of emotion. We do not experience emotions as things that we actively do or choose. Rather we experience them as mental states that we passively and automatically suffer. On this point, a feeling theory is again on much firmer footing, as it identifies emotions with bodily sensations, mental states that overcome us and lie outside our direct control.[32] To be sure,

someone who has an emotion might often be motivated to engage in certain behaviours, but again emotions are not themselves purposeful or goal-oriented behaviours.

Notice that denying emotions have meaning or signification in the way Sartre thinks they have is not to deny there might be other ways that emotions might 'signify' or have 'meaning'. These terms have various senses, and emotions may have 'meaning' or 'signify' in some other sense of those terms. For instance, emotions might be said to have meaning in Paul Grice's sense of 'natural meaning'.[33] An emotion might mean or signify something in the same way we might say that smoke means or signifies fire. If a person is feeling sad due to some prior trauma that they suffered, then we can say their sadness means or signifies the prior trauma that they suffered.[34] There is a sense here, then, in which an emotion means or signifies something, but again it is not the same sense of 'meaning' or 'signification' that Sartre wishes to employ in relation to emotion.

Emotions might also have 'meaning' in the sense of *being important to us*. For instance, emotions can be important to us in so far as they discharge valuable roles in our lives. We have seen already that one function served by emotion might be to make the world more bearable for us at times of difficulty. Or, as I argue elsewhere, emotions may discharge an important regulatory role by way of helping to ensure our moral judgments and desires are sensitive to what the particular features of our situations demand from us.[35]

Does denying that emotions have signification or meaning in Sartre's sense, imply that emotion fails to have an intentional or representational character, the property of representing the world as being a certain way? I am not sure that need be implied. It seems to me that mental states can be representational without being goal-oriented. Nevertheless, I think that if emotions are bodily feelings, then they do not have representational or intentional characters. Certainly, we often *talk as if* emotions are intentional mental states. For instance, we say that someone is frightened of a dog or angry they have been mistreated, where that suggests the person's emotion contains within itself a representation of an object or situation. But if emotion is a type of feeling, then how *can* emotion contain within itself a representation of anything? I do not see how that can be possible — and what is more I do not think that emotions present themselves as having representational characters — and for that reason I think that we are simply misled by how we talk about emotion.[36]

To accept that emotions are types of bodily feelings is not to deny, however, that when we undergo an emotion our conscious attention is focused primarily on the world. Often when we are afraid or angry (say) our attention is very much directed at the outside world, to the things that trigger our fear or anger, for instance. Indeed, we may only be vaguely aware that we are undergoing fear or anger at the time of undergoing the emotion. But all the same, recognise that in such cases we are not engaging only in disembodied cognition or ways of thinking. Rather, we are thinking about the world and its objects *with* fear, *with* anger. And these emotions that accompany our thoughts come with a phenomenology, a way of feeling, that characterises these emotions and which is palpable to us at the time of having the emotions, even if much of our conscious attention is directed elsewhere.

Conclusion

Sartre is to be applauded for highlighting how emotions can sometimes transform our perspective on the world in ways that might play a valuable psychological role at times of difficulty. But Sartre is mistaken to claim that emotions are the cognitive transformations that

we sometimes engage in when undergoing the emotions. Emotions have transformative powers, but they are distinct from the cognitive transformations they help bring about. Moreover, on one plausible way of understanding emotion's transformative powers, emotions turn out to be the very sort of things that Sartre claims at the outset they are not, namely types of bodily feelings.

Should this trouble us? Only if good reason exists to think that emotions cannot be feelings. Sartre dislikes James's feeling theory of emotion, but at best his critique of James succeeds only in showing that James misdescribes the bodily feelings that make up the emotions. Now, of course other reasons have been given for thinking that emotions are not bodily feelings or sensations. Also, for all that has been said so far, it remains an open question as to whether emotions might be compound states comprising bodily feelings and other mental phenomena (although on that question, I think James's subtraction argument makes very plausible the idea that emotions are nothing over and above types of bodily feelings). Nevertheless, if my critique of Sartre and defence of James are on the right track, then we can conclude that James's theory of emotion is superior to Sartre's theory of emotion.[37]

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[1] Sartre (1939, 41).
[2] A similar theory of emotion was proposed by a contemporary of James's, Carl Lange (1912) who emphasised the primacy of bodily activity in emotion. Hence, the theory is often referred to as the James-Lange theory of emotion. In this chapter though I will continue to refer to the theory as James's theory of emotion or James's feeling theory of emotion.
[3] James (1884, 190).
[4] James (1884, 193).
[5] Sartre can be seen to be echoing here Walter Cannon (1929) who also claimed that different emotions are associated with the same bodily modifications — a view held also by a number of emotion theorists after Sartre, most notably perhaps, Stanley Schachter and Joseph Singer (1962).
[6] Sartre (1939, 61).
[7] For Sartre, then, emotions are a form of 'behaviour of defeat'. In coming to this view, Sartre was influenced by the views of Pierre Janet. As Sartre writes: '[Janet]…treats emotion as a behaviour that is less well adapted, or, if one prefers, a behaviour of disadaptation, a behaviour of defeat. When the task is too difficult and we cannot maintain the higher behaviour appropriate to it, the psychic energy

that has been released takes another path; we adopt an inferior behaviour which necessitates a lesser psychic tension' (1939, 18). The key difference Sartre sees between his and Janet's theory lies in how they conceive of the 'inferior behaviour' that characterises emotion. Sartre complains that Janet associates the inferior behaviour with mechanical reflexes (thereby coming close to James's feeling theory), while for Sartre the inferior behaviour is purposeful or goal-oriented.

[8] Sartre (1939, 22).

[9] Ibid. 39-40.

[10] Ibid. 41.

[11] Ibid. 41-42.

[12] Ibid. 35. Emotional awareness is *non-reflective* in that it is outward looking and does not involve our reflecting on the emotion we are undergoing. When I project upon the grapes the property of being too green, my attention is caught up in the act of projection and I am aware only of the grapes and their being too green. To be sure, Sartre tells us, 'it is always possible to become aware of emotion as a fact of consciousness, as when we say: I am angry, I am afraid, etc.' (1939, 34). But Sartre's point is that this reflective act would be distinct from the emotion itself, which is a form of awareness directed on the world and not itself.

[13]Does this last feature of Sartre's account promise to pre-empt an objection often levelled at cognitive theories of emotion, namely that they fail to account for the felt or bodily aspects of emotion? As James writes in relation to the emotion of anger, abstract from anger all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms and 'the rage is as completely evaporated as the sensation of its so-called manifestations, and the only thing that can possibly be supposed to take its place is some cold-blooded and dispassionate judicial sentence, confined entirely to the intellectual realm, to the effect that a certain person or persons merit chastisement for their sins' (1884, 193). I think the answer to the question just posed depends largely on what the objection seeks to show. If the objection seeks to show that emotions are sensory or bodily and *not* cognitive by nature (as I believe James intends the objection), then Sartre's cognitive theory of emotion is also vulnerable to that objection.

[14] Sartre (1939, 51).

[15] The view that emotions carry or purport to carry important (evaluative) information about the world is held by many modern-day judgmental theories of emotion, according to which emotions are normative or evaluative judgments (for example: Solomon (1992); Nussbaum (2001)), as well as by many perceptual theories of emotion, according to which emotions are perceptual-like states with evaluative contents (for example: Prinz (2004); Tappolet (2016)).

[16] Sartre's theory of emotion is also distinctive in that Sartre associates different emotions with different kinds of representational contents. Sometimes the properties that Sartre thinks emotions project upon the world look like response dependent properties (e.g., sadness and the *bleakness* of the universe). Other times, they look like chemical properties (e.g., disdain and the *sourness* of the grapes). Other times again, the properties look like agential properties (e.g., sadness and *powerlessness*, joy and *possessing something* as an instantaneous totality). And, again, at other times the properties look like existential properties (e.g., fear and the property of *not existing*). In this chapter, I overlook this feature of Sartre's theory of emotion, although I think it very likely that feature is relevant to an evaluation of Sartre's theory.

[17] See, for example, Solomon (1992); Neu (2000); Nussbaum (2001); Tappolet (2016). Sartre's theory can also be viewed as a forerunner to 'social role' theories of emotion, which take emotions to be defined in terms of their social roles (see, for instance, Averill (1980); Harré (1986); on this point see also Scarantino and de Sousa (2018)), as well as being influential in the development of evolutionary perspectives on emotion that consider emotions to be evolved strategic or adaptive responses (see, for instance, Griffiths (2003) who taking inspiration from Sartre claims that emotions 'show an evolved sensitivity to strategically significant aspects of the organism's social context' (2003, 62); see also Griffiths (2004)).

[18] Moreover, the long-term effects of such a behaviour on a person if they survive might be very negative. On this point, see Anthony Hatzimoysis's discussion of post-traumatic stress disorder and Sartre's treatment of passive fear, Hatzimoysis (2014).

[19] Sartre gives the example of a man who learns that he will soon have something that he desires but realising the object is not yet his is led to enact 'magical behaviour which tries…to realize the

possession of the desired object as an instantaneous totality' (1939, 46), a way of construing or relating to the object that on Sartre's account characterises the man's joy.

[20] See also Weberman (1996); for a sympathetic discussion of Sartre's treatment of positive emotion, see Elpidorou (2017).

[21] See also Weberman (1996).

[22] Sartre (1939, 41).

[23] Ibid., 42.

[24] We could try to rescue Sartre by marking a distinction between the emotion (fear) that is a cognitive act and a more general affective state (the felt urgency of the danger) giving rise to the emotion. This might even be how Sartre intends his example to be taken. Regardless, many of us when reflecting on the example will struggle to separate the fear from the affective state characterising the felt urgency of the danger, and in line with what I say in the main text will consider the example to really show that fear is the source of the cognitive act and not identical with it.

[25] Whiting (2020: Chapter 4)

[26] By saying the atomic structure of a vase bears no essential relation to anything external to the vase, I mean it is not of the essence or nature of the atomic structure of a vase to bear a relation to anything external to the vase (unlike the vase's dispositional profile the nature of which does refer to things external to the vase). This is of course consistent with holding that the atomic structure of a vase might nevertheless causally depend on things external to the vase, the ambient temperature and air pressure around the vase, for instance.

[27] Also, I consider desires to *be* motivational or dispositional properties, whereas in the main text I am construing emotions to be those things that *ground or explain* our motivational or dispositional properties, our being motivated or disposed to behave or think in certain ways. I take that to rule out emotions being desires, since I take it that emotions cannot comprise the very properties that they are grounding or explaining. For elaboration of the point, see Whiting (2020: Chapter 4).

[28] Hume, for instance: see Hume (1739); Whiting (2011; 2020)

[29] See Scarantino and de Sousa (2018).

[30] To be sure, some mental states comprising emotions share similar feelings. For instance, pride and admiration involve a pleasurable sensation. However, such mental states fail to serve as counterexamples to the idea that emotions are nothing but their characteristic feelings. Plausibly states such as pride and admiration are hybrid mental states, comprising emotions *and* thoughts. For instance, we might identify pride with a pleasurable sensation *along with* a thought of personal achievement, and admiration with a pleasurable sensation *along with* a positive evaluation of some other person. Alternatively, the thoughts involved in these mental states might merely serve as individuating causes. On this alternative picture, a pleasurable sensation counts as pride only if it has been caused by the thought of a personal achievement (in the same way that a burn qualifies as sunburn only if it has been caused by the sun); the thought is not part of pride (in the same way the sun is not part of sunburn) but the thought is needed for the pleasurable feeling that is pride to qualify as pride.

[31] Whiting (2020: Chapter 3)

[32] The claim that emotions are (purposeful or goal-oriented) behaviours need not imply that emotions are within our direct control. And there might even be a reading of Sartre according to which emotions are behaviours we enact automatically or involuntarily when there is a clash between our projects and the brute realities of our situations (see Elpidorou 2017). But even if Sartre's view were to be read in this way, my complaint against Sartre would essentially still stand, since I support that emotions do not present themselves to consciousness as being *any* form of conduct or behaviour, including behaviour that is automatic or involuntary. Again (and consistent with a feeling theory) emotions present as passions or ways of being acted upon, mental states that overcome or happen to us, rather than things we actively or purposively do.

[33] Grice (1957).

[34] Sartre himself recognises something like Grice's sense of natural meaning when discussing the psychoanalytical view of emotion. Sartre writes: 'the conscious fact is related to what it signifies, as a thing which is the effect of a certain event is related to that event: as, for example, the ashes of a fire extinct upon a mountain are related to the human beings who lit the fire. Their presence is not contained in the remaining cinders, but connected with them by a relation of causality: the relation is

external, the ashes of the fire are passive considered in that causal relation, as every effect is in relation to its cause' (1939, 31). Sartre goes on to reject this conception of 'signification' as applied to emotion on the grounds that emotional consciousness contains its signification 'within itself as a structure of consciousness' — a point that I take issue with in the main text.

[35] Whiting (2020: Chapters 5 and 6)

[36] For further discussion, see Whiting (2020: Chapter 3). From which it follows that how we talk about emotion needs to be interpreted in a way that does not involve assigning intentional or representational contents to emotion. See Whiting (2020: Chapter 3) for further discussion of the point.

[37]I am grateful to Talia Morag and an anonymous reviewer for their very helpful comments.