

Hermeneutic and structuralistic approach to emotionality

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Emotionality as a dimension of expression of man's life becomes a philosophic issue in different ways depending on the question whether the circumstances of a society enhance it or suppress it, whether emotionality is misused politically or dominated rationally. In Germany's post-war society the experience of an enormously increased emotionality between the Führer(Leader) and the masses and the destructive consequences of worship of a race and hatred for a race were so very much present that under a feeling of anxiety and guilt the dangerous emotions were rather to be avoided and forgotten. The philosophically legitimated form of emotion was anxiety, in which becoming aware of one's existence developed into 'Sein zum Tode'[existence heading for death], as M. Heidegger suggests in his first main work "Sein und Zeit"[existence and time]. The contrast to the existentialistic legitimation of the emotion 'anxiety' was the emotionless, functional approach to man in economy and technology, with which the reconstruction of a society was attempted. However, this was no basis for common action within a family, a society or a political unit, no 'Miteinander' to use Heidegger's words.

Thus it is not surprising that a philosophy was met with approval in which the search for understanding(=literal meaning of the Greek word hermeneutic), the search for the meaning of the utterance of an interlocutor - be it language or action -, or the search for the meaning of a text, was put on the agenda. Are we able to understand ourselves and each other, is communication possible, this has always been a fateful question for societies. One issue was raised especially, whether our own present time can be understood in relation to the past, or whether the break in the historical development is so radical that the past is unable to play a mediatory role in our endeavours to understand the present.

In this situation H. G. Gadamer coined the motto. Yes, the present can be

understood in the light of the past. The alienation from the past is not radical and absolute, it is only relative. Tradition is not torn off, in fact we 'stehen noch in der Tradition' [continue to exist within the tradition]. It is still valid. This tradition is the classic humanistic tradition of Hellenism which inspired the German classicism of poetry(Schiller, Goethe) and music(Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven). In the sense of this tradition we can recognize and find ourselves. Emotionality becomes an issue in this concept of hermeneutics, because understanding and agreement are the great philosophic objects and these imply certain emotional attitudes, which are presupposed in the hermeneutic approach. For we can be sure about one thing: hermeneutics is not an unbiased, emotionless manner of recognition but a way of approaching someone establishing values and emotions. E. Husserl's theory 'der Einfühlung' [theory of empathy, of capacity for understanding] is presupposed as well as M. Scheler's concept of 'Sympathie'[sympathy]. Hermeneutics demands becoming aware of one's own point of view, of one's own perspective which infiltrates the process of understanding in a prejudiced way. It demands, however, just as well becoming aware of the different kind and strangeness of the other's or the text's perspective and it is vital that the person who asks the question allows to be taught otherwise by the other's answer. Therefore certain emotional qualities are required which permit a 'echtes Gespräch'[real dialogue], a feeling for one's own identity, an open-mindedness and tolerance for the other, the readiness to overcome prejudices and the will to come to an agreement in language. At last it is Greek virtues like good will(eunoia) and friendship(philia) that stand behind the emotions, which allow hermeneutic understanding, not to forget the Aristotelian practical deliberation(phronesis), which is the perfect example of practical reason and in hermeneutics develops further into linguistic reason.

Important as the hermeneutic approach may have been for post-war society and philosophy and still is today, serious doubts arose that this kind of understanding would be too much determined by the intention of acquisition of the other, that the strangeness of the other is actually not endured and is too quickly included into mutual understanding. Especially Gadamer's notion of hermeneutics evokes suspicion that the break in tradition is played down to a continuous 'Stehen in der Tradition'[persisting in tradition], that the humanistic

reason is accepted as still intact and that on its basis reconciliation in the dialogue seems possible. Here the anti-hermeneutic doubts of the structuralists and post-structuralists have appeared. In certain ways F. Nietzsche had already worked in advance in his "Fröhliche Wissenschaft" by coining the motto "Wir Unverständlichen"[we the incomprehensible] in contrast to the axiom of comprehensibility by the hermeneutics. J. Lacan has continued this line with his notion of speaking and language. He warns us of all people who assert that they have understood their interlocutor. For Lacan empathy or capacity for understanding is suspected to be ideological. For here the ego(moi) puts something into the interlocutor, in which he recognizes himself. Ego and alter ego, however, resemble each other absolutely. The other ego is the ego in a different place. In fact it is about the doubling of the ego, the condition of reflection, which Lacan described extensively in his essay on the stage of reflection. Consequently man's entire emotionality and his emotional reactions on the other become suspected to be imaginary, i. e. to contain reflected projection. Lacan rejects the dimension of resonance of emotions in favour of self-awareness in and by means of language. The problem of linguistic expression and the question of meaning are the central issues. Lacan defines this linguistic level with the help of F. d. Saussure's terminology as relation from significant[=an essential to the determination of some larger element of a language] to significant and as the question of connection significant to a chain. If the language, however, is taken into consideration to such an extent, what does this mean for the issue of emotionality?

For this purpose let's recall Lacan's fundamental categories. There is first of all his reference to the material level of necessities, necessities which constitute on pole of human existence and from which the intentions of the subject emanate. The other pole is constituted by the chain of significants, which is interlaced with the intentions, thwarted by them, and hence the vital matter is articulated: What do you want?(che voi). However, what are these intentions of the subject composed of? Lacan refers back to the animal's needs, the satisfaction of which are certainly guaranteed in fundamental aspects by the instincts. Man's necessities already differ in this corporal-physiological aspect from the needs of the animal. Being in need of something(besoin de) does not mean that its satisfaction is ready to be called for, Lacan rather believes in a fundamental

rupture in human nature, which confronts even the infant with 'Not des Lebens'[affliction of life]. It forces the child who is threatened with death to turn to the other with a demand(demande) containing two things at a time: the wish for affection or acknowledgement of the demand as well as satisfaction to be granted. From that it is clear that there is no isolated corporal necessity in the human creature, there is merely a wish articulated between humans, which ties man into culture.

Here, in this dimension of demand(demande) and answer(response), Lacan's two categorical triads cross over: being in need of(besoin de), demand(demande) and desire(desir) as well as the real(le re,le), the imaginary(l'imaginaire) and the symbolic(le symbolique). For now the question arises how man articulates his demand and which experience he is able to gain from the response of the other. The question of the real proves to be a fundamental one in respect to truth and ethics. What is real? The question cannot be answered via the dimension of man's necessities. There is no list of fundamental necessities, which gives a full and complete answer to the question what man is really in need of. How is it then possible to find out, whether my demand is a legitimate one and stands a chance to be answered?

Lacan knows two basic modalities, which may cover demand and answer: The first is the one of the imaginary. Here man turns to the other (a) with the demand for total satisfaction. The relation of the imaginary is a world of two(I-you), the structure of the desire is a total one, the necessity of disappointment is total as well, from this arises destructive aggression. Deception and disappointment cannot be resolved in this situation.

The second modality is one of the symbolic. Here the demand on the other (a) is experienced by means of the third (A). The three dimensions of the language are spread out(I, you, he-she-it). The third steps between I and you as a limiting principle. He rejects the imaginary demands for total satisfaction: the demand (1) must recognize his boundlessness and self-centredness (a') and is first confronted with deficiency. And yet the third provides the symbolic answer, which makes limited and thus real satisfaction possible. Only by going through the symbolic the question of the real can be resolved. Lacan's answer

in short is: I am a being of desire(desir). There is no total satisfaction, the symbolic confronts me with an unresolvable deficiency. But it grants me the (symbolic) gift. which promises satisfaction within limits.

If we ask ourselves which place emotionality may take in this model of humanity and its relations, we are at a loss and find that it actually cannot be categorized properly. The conception of man as a being who speaks a language, as a being with imaginary desires and as a being with necessities, does not offer any space for this psychic dimension. Lacan's polemics against empathy and capacity for understanding suggest to assign emotions to the dimension of the imaginary. In this case they would be expressions of emotions combined with inward imagined pictures, which reveal a phantastic scenario, that must be questioned and overcome from the symbolic. The whole lot of emotions would be stigmatized with the irrational and would be disruptive factors in human life, which have to be corrected with the help of the language. As Ch. Darwin has impressively explained in his book: "The expression of emotion on man and animal", this way of seeing it would not include the idea of emotions having developed as means of expression and communication in the evolution, which not only guarantee basic understanding among animals on the basis of instinct, but also allow the human baby a first possibility of communication. (Cf A. Krause "Triebe und Affekte" in: Allgemeine psychoanalytische Krankheitslehre vol 2 Stuttgart 1998). The positive capability of emotions und the basic knowledge stored in them about one's own needs, the mode of expressing necessities, the response from the fellow beings and their digestion in the self-awareness of emotions would be underrated and systematically excluded. Whatever the imagination learns through communication and interaction with fellow beings in connection with emotions and shapes according to specific cultures, must be neglected in this perspective of Lacan's. Only the distorted emotion, which becomes a disturbing factor in the interhuman relation, finds its way into this theory: An emotion, which does not differentiate between oneself and the other(e. g. the phenomenon of infectious emotion, the spreading of moods etc) as well as an emotion, which puts "Eigenes"[one's own] into "Fremdes"[someone else's] and drags "Fremdes"[someone else's] into "Eigenes"[one's own], which therefore also builds up and escalates in an un-real and ir-rational way.

Let's therefore try to consider Lacan's alternative way suggesting that the emotions above all find their place in the symbolic. This would mean that they essentially represent emotions expressed in language or at least linguistic expressions. Indeed, we know that emotions can find their way into language, that they can be clarified within the language, whether they refer to the subject, the other, to an inner state or the body, whether they are appropriate to the situation, too weak or too strong. The strength of Lacan's theory would lie in stating the emotions expressed in language and in pointing out their differential rationality of the linguistic kind.

Where, however, do the emotions remain which have trouble entering the language? Lacan should have to claim that they are structured themselves like a language, e. g. the smile, the look in the eye, the fit of anger. In the context of symptoms he indeed speaks of the 'Denkmäler des Leibes' [monuments of the body] and its 'Archiven' [archives]. Understood in this way they can be read and deciphered. The notion of language is expanded in a questionable way though. It comprises language and gestures, mimicry. The analogies of gestures and mimicry with language are given, but the exact parallel in the sense of pragmatics, semantics and grammar is missing. At the same time emotions seem to be a different form of communication, we cannot simply draw a line parallel to the language. With Lacan's approach we are after all left in uncertainty about how to categorize emotions. This actually was the point which left the post-structuralists J. Derrida and J. Kristeva dissatisfied and caused them to consider the idea of introducing a dimension between body and language, in which the body is not yet language and the language not just body. This dimension would be so to speak the womb of the "Sprache" [language]. It is known that Derrida following Platon calls it "Chora". Kristeva speaks in this context of the semiotic. Although these two conceptions cannot simply be equated with the life of emotions, since the latter is too much contaminated with consciousness and language; although they also do not coincide with affect, which denotes the unconscious process of the body underlying the life of the emotions; nevertheless a common ground can be seen between Chora or the semiotic and the emotions in the sense that they represent processes of the body, in which meanings can be observed emerging.

The emotional utterances of the baby are such forms of expression coming into being, which seek communication with the mother. Here would be a starting-point for clarifying the status of emotions philosophically.

Hermeneutic and structuralistic approach to emotionality Another starting-point could be found in the theory of Susanne Langer, who differentiates in her work "Philosophie auf neuen Wegen"[philosophy following a new avenue] between diskursiv and presentative symbols, in other words between word characters and icons and obviously fell back upon differentiations made by Ch. Peirce. The expression of emotions must certainly not be equated with the icon; but it contains iconic elements. It partly bases on forms of expression which have developed in the evolution of the species as gestic-mimic signals between the organisms, partly it contains further developments, which have resulted from the practice of mimicking and gesturing between the organisms on the basis of imitation and play. Man's cultural forms of expression are also included here, which from the age of two onward become self-referential, as we know from psychology. From this age on there are also feelings about oneself like shame, guilt, doubts, overestimation etc. Here Lacan's theory has got a systematic defect, since it cannot really grasp and categorize this positive knowledge of a-verbal kind and the possibilities of communication by means of emotions before the language, in fact it must either pull them into a far-extended notion of language or assign them to a biological core of necessities, instincts and reflexes. The problem of emotions, however, requires a more differentiated philosophical solution.