

## Demystifying Emotions

*Demystifying Emotions* provides a comprehensive typology of emotion theories in psychology (evolutionary, network, appraisal, goal-directed, psychological constructionist, and social) and philosophy (feeling, judgmental, quasi-judgmental, perceptual, embodied, and motivational) in a systematic manner with the help of tools from philosophy of science, allowing scholars in both fields to understand the commonalities and differences between these theories. Agnes Moors also proposes her own novel, skeptical theory of emotions, called the goal-directed theory, based on the central idea that all kinds of behaviors and feelings are grounded in goal-striving. Whereas most scholars of emotion do not call the notion of emotion itself into question, this review engages in a critical examination of its scientific legitimacy. This book will appeal to readers in psychology, philosophy, and related disciplines who want to gain a deeper understanding of the controversies at play in the emotion domain.

AGNES MOORS is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven, Belgium, where she is a member of the Research Group of Quantitative Psychology and Individual Differences and the Center for Social and Cultural Psychology. Her research combines theoretical work, informed by philosophy, with empirical work.

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*(Continued after the index)*

# Demystifying Emotions

*A Typology of Theories in Psychology and  
Philosophy*

Agnes Moors  
KU Leuven



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## Preface

Almost every book on emotions starts with a description of a variety of emotions – ranging from joy over being kissed back by a love interest, the nagging regret over a short-sighted decision, pride in the accomplishment of a difficult task, sadness over a definitive goodbye, fear of being attacked in a dark alley, and anger about being mistreated or underestimated. This is followed by emphasizing how emotions are the spice of our lives without which we would be condemned to leading a dull existence. After that, the reader is alerted to the fact that the history of our science shows eras of emotional drought when scientists did not know how to fit emotions in their impoverished frameworks, followed by eras of emotional flood in which a wealth of emotion theories have mushroomed but that show a striking lack of consensus. Authors then promise to provide solace by presenting a novel way of organizing the differences and similarities between theories, and if the reader is lucky, a novel theory that deals with all the challenges of its predecessors and beyond.

I share these authors' ambition to present a novel way of organizing the literature, and even in proposing a novel theory of the phenomena called emotions. Yet, whereas most scholars of emotion do not call the notion of emotion itself into question nor its causal powers, I will critically examine its scientific legitimacy and fruitfulness. Without denying the scientific interest in explaining the phenomena themselves, that is, the fact that our everyday routines are traversed by ups and downs, I will join the small brigade of skeptical theorists in their attempt to demystify the phenomena called emotions.

The first aim of the book is to compare major emotion theories in psychology (i.e., evolutionary, network, appraisal, goal-directed, psychological constructionist, and social theories) and philosophy (i.e., feeling, judgmental, quasi-judgmental, perceptual, embodied, and motivational theories) in a systematic manner with the help of tools from philosophy of science. Although previous comparisons of theories have provided many useful insights, they tend to be partial. All too often, scholars are guilty of portraying rival theories in a caricatured way so that their own theory emerges as the miracle solution. I believe the time is ripe for a more

in-depth and systematic approach. This will be to list phenomena that merit explanation, to describe and compare possible explanations for these phenomena, using a fine-tooth comb, and to examine whether and how these explanations can be tested empirically and whether they are internally consistent. It is not my aim to settle any of the debates in a definitive manner nor to enforce premature consensus. My first hope is that this exercise will lead to the clearing up of misunderstandings among emotion theorists. This may increase consensus in some respects but it may also lead to a sharpening of the real differences. Once real differences are identified, ways of examining them can be developed and targeted efforts can be made to further investigate these differences. This may eventually move the field forward.

The second aim of the book is to propose my own skeptical theory of the phenomena called emotions. Much of my previous theoretical and empirical work on emotions was inspired by appraisal theories. However, several elements contributed to a shift in my thinking and culminated in the recently developed goal-directed theory. One element is my own lab's failures to empirically confirm hypotheses of appraisal theories about the influence of appraisals on action tendencies, especially when appraisals were manipulated experimentally and action tendencies were measured with indirect objective methods. Another element is the range of challenges articulated by existing skeptical theories. A final element is my increasing acquaintance with other literatures such as those on motivation, action, and operant learning. Applying insights from these literatures to the study of emotion combined with a sizable skepticism about popular dual-system models in psychology changed my thinking for good.

The book is structured as follows. The first part ("Introduction") comprises two chapters. Chapter 1 ("Theory Development and Concepts") lays out a meta-theoretical framework composed of insights borrowed from philosophy of science. This framework forms the backbone of the book and is indispensable for understanding the following chapters. Chapter 2 ("Demarcation-Explanation Cycle Applied to Emotion Theories") applies this framework to the emotion domain, providing a blueprint for the analysis of emotion theories discussed in the second part ("Emotion theories one by one"). This part comprises seven chapters. Chapter 3 ("General Precursors") kicks off with Darwin (1872), followed by James (1890b), whose theory is called a feeling theory in philosophy. Chapter 4 ("Evolutionary Theories") covers evolutionary theories in psychology, also known as motivational theories in philosophy. Chapter 5 ("Network Theories") discusses network theories in psychology and kindred theories in philosophy. Chapter 6 ("Stimulus Evaluation Theories") handles stimulus evaluation theories, which

include appraisal theories in psychology, and judgmental theories, quasi-judgmental theories, perceptual theories, and embodied theories in philosophy. Chapter 7 (“Response Evaluation Theories”) is dedicated to response evaluation theories, in particular my own version of them, the goal-directed theory. Chapter 8 (“Psychological Constructionist Theories”) discusses psychological constructionist theories. After having discussed these “personal” emotion theories, I discuss the “social” versions of these theories in Chapter 9 (“Social Theories”). The book closes with a third part and Chapter 10 (“Conclusion”), in which I examine whether some form of integration of the discussed theories is possible.

Each of the seven theory chapters includes a description of important lines of empirical research that have been carried out under the umbrella of the respective theory. The empirical parts are not meant as exhaustive overviews but try to give insight into the ways in which research has tackled the questions identified in the theoretical parts.

The book is interspersed with three boxes that delve deeper into issues that transcend individual theories. Box 2.1 pitches the distinction between stimulus-driven and goal-directed processes, which I consider to be one of the central axes on which theories differ. Box 2.2 organizes empirical research methods. Box 7.1 clarifies the nuts and bolts of emotion regulation.

## Acknowledgment

They say writing a book is like getting a tattoo. It stings for a while and once the ink is dry, there is no turning back. Consider this an apology to all authors that I may have unwittingly misrepresented. I am indebted to a number of wise people for giving me opportunities, inspiring me, and trying to keep me sharp: Jan De Houwer, Nico Frijda, Jim Russell, and Klaus Scherer, for all these things at once; Yannick Boddez, Maja Fischer, Eike Buabang, Massimo Köster, Sander Van de Cruys, and Yael Ecker, for making the goal-directed theory come to life also in other areas than emotion; Andrea Scarantino, Stéphane Lemaire, Alan Fridlund, Fabrice Teroni, Kris Goffin, Constant Bonard, and Phoebe Ellsworth, for valuable discussions and answering several last-minute questions over the past year; Keith Oatley for the invitation to write the book and guiding me through the first steps; Brian Parkinson for being exactly the editor that I needed; Cees van Leeuwen, Batja Mesquita, Deb Vansteenwegen, Jessica Moors, and Frank Baeyens for their moral support; my parents, other siblings, other colleagues, and other friends – but above all – my love interest David, and my sons Jascha, Lewi, Ilja, and Sinn, for their generous care and for getting on with their lives when mine stood still. The book is dedicated to my father Simon Moors.

## Abbreviations

CNS	central nervous system
PNS	peripheral nervous system
ANS	autonomous nervous system
SNS	somatic nervous system
ES	endocrine system
S	raw stimulus
eS	raw external stimulus
iS	raw internal stimulus
[S]	afferent/stimulus representation
[ecS]	external concrete stimulus representation
[eaS]	external abstract stimulus representation
[icS]	internal concrete stimulus representation
[iaS]	internal abstract stimulus representation
[O/R]	efferent representation
[O <sup>v</sup> ]	non-behavioral goal
[R]	abstract behavioral goal or behavior representation
[r]	concrete behavioral goal or behavior representation
R	overt response
sR	somatic response
mR	motor response
smR	subtle motor response
cmR	coarse motor response
[R <sub>as</sub> ]	strategy of assimilation
[R <sub>ac</sub> ]	strategy of accommodation
[R <sub>im</sub> ]	strategy of immunization
S–R	stimulus-response
O <sup>v</sup>	valued outcome
S:R–O <sup>v</sup>	relation between a response and a valued outcome given a certain stimulus



xviii *List of Abbreviations*

US	unconditioned stimulus
CS	conditioned stimulus
UR	unconditioned response
CR	conditioned response
DS	dynamic systems
SET	stimulus evaluation theory
RET	response evaluation theory
PCT	psychological constructionist theory
SCT	social constructionist theory
FACS	facial action coding system
EMG	electromyography
RT	reaction time
MEP	motor evoked potential
TMS	transcranial magnetic stimulation
IAT	implicit association task
EPT	evaluative priming task