



Dormant and active emotional states

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Abstract

The paper is concerned with the metaphysics of emotion. It defends the claim that all emotional states, whether dormant or active, are dispositional, arguing against the prevailing view that dispositional emotional states are dispositions to go into actual emotional states. A clear distinction may be made between first-order and second-order emotional dispositions, where second-order emotional dispositions are dispositions of emotional sensitivity and first-order emotional dispositions are the emotional states themselves. Active emotional states are treated as dispositional emotional states in the process of being manifested, not as different states altogether. Describing active states as occurrent states is misleading as it suggests an exclusive distinction between active/occurrent and dispositional, which is what is being questioned. The idea that dispositional states have no subjectivity is challenged, as is the argument that being flooded with a feeling as a result of an encounter with a frightening or aggravating situation cannot be the manifestation of a disposition.

Keywords Emotion · Disposition · Occurrent · Feeling

1 Introduction

George Pitcher marks a familiar distinction in the philosophy of emotions as follows:

When it is said of someone that he has an emotion, this may be said of him either in (a) an occurrent, or in (b) a dispositional sense. A person who is frightened by a face at a window, or who gets angry at two boys because they are mistreating a dog, has an emotion in the former, occurrent, sense – he is actually *in the grip of* the emotion. But a person who hates his father, or is jealous of his landlord ,

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has an emotion in the latter, dispositional, sense – he may not actually be feeling the emotion now. (Pitcher, 1965, pp. 331–2)¹

I will take issue with this idea that there are two different senses in which someone has an emotion. While it is unquestionably the case that there is a proper distinction to be marked here, I take it that it is the distinction between an emotional state being active and the same state being dormant, not a distinction between two kinds of emotional state—occurrent and dispositional ones. I will argue that when you are in the grip of anger with the two boys for mistreating the dog you are in the very same dispositional state you will be in later when you have cooled down and are thinking about something else altogether though still angry with the two boys for mistreating the dog. When in the grip of anger you are in a dispositional state that is in the process of being manifested—it is an active dispositional state. Later, you are in the same dispositional state—it may still be said of you that you are angry with the two boys for mistreating the dog—but the disposition is not being manifested and the anger is dormant.²

The distinction between these two sorts of emotional state is marked in something like Pitcher’s way in almost every philosophical treatment of emotion, and is usually treated as a distinction between dispositional and occurrent states, though sometimes as a distinction between dispositional and actual states. For example, Bill Lyons (1980, p. 54) claims that there is an ambiguity in saying that a father is angry with his son for taking his car and crashing it into a wall. In the occurrent sense it means that the father is in the grip of anger and in the dispositional sense it means just that he is liable to get into actual states of anger. Richard Wollheim claims that when we describe someone as having an emotion—e.g. by saying that Hamlet was angry with his mother or that Macbeth was frightened of Banquo’s issue—“we might be talking either about one or another of the underlying dispositions of these characters or about certain episodic states of theirs in which these dispositions erupt or originate.” (1999, p. 9) Deonna and Teroni (2012, p. 8) make the claim in very similar terms to Lyons. Jesse Prinz (2006, p. 4), says that “dispositional fear must be a disposition to enter fear states,” and Aaron Ben Ze’ev (2000, p. 80) describes the occurrent state as the actual state of fear, while the dispositional state is merely potential fear. The view is certainly the prevailing view in the literature and is close to ubiquitous. We can track it at least as far back as G.F. Stout’s *Manual of Psychology*. “An emotion is always an actual state of consciousness; an emotional disposition is a persistent tendency to feel a certain kind of emotion in the presence of a certain kind of object.” (Stout, 1899, p. 299).

Rejecting this consensus is not just a terminological matter of switching from talking about dispositional and occurrent states to talking about dormant and active dispositional states. There are two substantial metaphysical claims involved in this rejection. One is that dormant emotional states are not manifested by active emotional states. This opens up the possibility that they are manifested by something else altogether—perhaps expressive or rationally sensitive behaviour. The other is that dormant

¹ Although this quotation serves quite well as an articulation of the position I am arguing against, Pitcher’s own view in that paper is more nuanced. When we describe someone as having an emotion in the occurrent sense, according to Pitcher, we are still describing them in dispositional terms; it’s just that the state they are in is manifested in emotionally expressive behaviour and not just in having certain thoughts.

² I am using the term ‘dormant’ simply to mean ‘not active’.

emotional states and active emotional states are the same states; the difference is just one of whether or not the disposition is in the process of being manifested, or at least would be in that process if it were not being counteracted.

The paper concerns the metaphysics of emotion and might seem superfluous to the concerns of most people working on the nature of emotion, just as the metaphysics of numbers might seem superfluous to the concerns of most mathematicians. But the philosophy of emotion is currently lagging behind other aspects of the philosophy of mind in clarifying the metaphysical nature of the states it considers and is arguably somewhat light on metaphysical precision. So, rather than treating the lacuna as a reason for thinking such a consideration is superfluous, it seems more reasonable to take it as a reason to think that it is sorely needed. If there really is a metaphysical confusion in the way emotions are described in much of the philosophy of emotion, as I argue here, this is worth sorting out for its own sake. Moreover, such confusion is likely to have ramifications further down the line in any developed account.

For example, clarifying the metaphysical nature of emotional states may enable us to avoid the pessimistic conclusion of those like Peter Goldie, who argue that there is not a particular mental state that we are attributing to someone when we say that they are angry.

An emotion—for example, John's being angry or Jane's being in love—is typically *complex, episodic, dynamic, and structured*. An emotion is complex in that it will typically involve many different elements: it involves episodes of emotional experience, including perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of various kinds, and bodily changes of various kinds; and it involves dispositions, including dispositions to experience further emotional episodes, to have further thoughts and feelings, and to behave in certain ways. Emotions are episodic and dynamic, in that, over time, the elements can come and go, and wax and wane, depending on all sorts of factors. (Goldie, 2002, pp. 12–13)

Goldie here appears to conflate states and processes, and confusingly treats manifestations of emotions as elements of emotions. It is not John's being angry that is complex, episodic, dynamic and structured, but John's manifesting that anger in a complex episodic, dynamic and structured process. My knowing the function of xylem in plants is not itself dynamic and episodic, though the process of my manifesting this knowledge, perhaps in making an explanation to someone, is. In the same way, the fact that emotions like anger and grief are manifested in complex interactive processes does not show that there is no single state of anger or grief that one is in for the duration of that process.

2 Metaphysics of dispositions

I start by clarifying my stance on the metaphysics of dispositional states and then apply this stance to respond to some arguments for thinking that dormant and active emotional states must be different states. The metaphysical stance I adopt is a fairly

orthodox Aristotelian realism about dispositions.³ I hope to be able to bypass many of the unresolved arguments in the philosophy of dispositions; but someone more sceptical about dispositions, like a Humean anti-realist about powers may still be left frustrated. One thing that I won't address, although it is important in other contexts, is the difference between dispositions, powers, inclinations, and tendencies. For the purposes of this paper I will describe them all as dispositional states.

If something has a disposition to do something it follows that it will do it in certain circumstances—if the disposition is triggered, remains in place and is not interfered with. But it doesn't mean that it is doing it at that very moment. A fragile glass may just be sitting in a cupboard unmoved, though it has a disposition to shatter if struck forcibly. So, there is a distinction between being disposed to shatter and actually shattering. If the fragility of the glass is dormant then the glass is not actually shattering. This is what it means to say that dispositions are potentialities rather than actualities.

Gilbert Ryle is an example of someone who takes this to mean that dispositions are not actual states.

“Potentialities, it is truistically said, are nothing actual. The world does not contain, over and above what exists and happens, some other things which are mere would-be things and could-be happenings.” (1949, p. 119)

He goes on to conclude that dispositional statements do not report matters of fact. Their role is pragmatic rather than descriptive.

But this is just a logical confusion. As C.B. Martin (1994, p. 1) puts it, “It is an elementary confusion to think of unmanifesting dispositions as unactualized *possibilia*, though that may characterize unmanifested manifestations.” What is merely potential is not actual; but it does not follow that *potentialities* are not actual. We should not confuse a potentiality with whatever it is that it is a potentiality for. A fragile glass is not disposed to be fragile; it is disposed to shatter. If there is a potentiality for *X* then *X* may be merely potential and not actual. But the potentiality for *X* is actual and not merely a potential potentiality. So dispositional states are actual states, even though their manifestations may at that time not be actual but merely potential.

For example, Botulinum toxin is very poisonous and it does not stop being actually poisonous when it is not in the process of killing anyone. It would be a very poor analysis of what it is to be poisonous to say that there is an ambiguity when we describe Botulinum toxin as poisonous—an ambiguity between describing it as being dispositionally poisonous and describing it as actually poisoning someone. The same goes for our attribution of dispositional emotional states. Being jealous of your landlord or angry with your father are emotional states. And they don't stop being emotional states—*actual* emotional states—just because they are currently not active.

I take it that there are three aspects to a dispositional state: (i) what it is a disposition for—a structure of changes that may not have yet happened; (ii) the real state that may be identified as obtaining whether or not the disposition is currently being manifested in that structure of changes; (iii) the further conditions that need to obtain for that real state to be fully realised in the structure of changes. For example, the fragility of a glass is a disposition for the glass to shatter—a structure of changes; it has a nature

³ See, for example, Harré and Madden (1975), Mumford (2003) and the papers in Marmodoro (ed.) (2010).

identifiable independently of its being manifested; and there are further conditions that are required to trigger and fully realize that disposition so that it does shatter. The second clause—the identifiable nature of the dispositional state—is a matter of contention in many of the debates in the philosophy of dispositions, but it doesn't concern me here. The further conditions that need to obtain for the disposition to be fully realized in some process like shattering may be divided into two classes. There are the operational or triggering conditions that put the disposition into action. For example, the glass needs to be smashed against a hard object. These combine with the conditions that constitute the real nature of the disposition to result in an active disposition. The other condition is some version of a *ceteris paribus* clause. It is the condition that nothing interferes or counteracts the manifestation of the disposition.

Interference might happen at different stages. One form of interference is the sort of thing that 'finks' are supposed to do in counterexamples to straightforward counterfactual accounts of dispositions. C.B. Martin's 'reverse electro-fink' makes a conductive wire non-conductive when all the operational conditions have been satisfied. So, when a potential difference is placed across the wire the reverse electro-fink magically removes the conductivity from the wire. It is not the case that the wire would conduct a current if a potential difference were placed across it; but it nevertheless has the disposition to conduct a current if a potential difference is placed across it. The reverse electro-fink is not interfering with the working of the disposition, but is interfering by removing the dispositional property altogether (albeit temporarily).⁴ So the lack of this sort of interference does not have to be included as a condition for the manifestation of the disposition.

The sort of interference that does need to be excluded by some sort of *ceteris paribus* clause is 'counteracting' interference. Suppose a conductive wire has a potential difference placed across it; it will not conduct a current if an exactly equal but opposite potential difference is also placed across it. The two batteries in the circuit pointing in opposite directions cancel each other out. And with this category of interference there is no guarantee that a finite list of possible interfering factors can be produced to be ruled out explicitly. The manifestation of the passing of a current through the wire may be counteracted in other ways. For example, if the wire is passed through a magnet at the same time as the potential difference is placed across it, again it might be that no current passes through.

If the only thing that is stopping a disposition from being manifested is something counteracting the manifestation, then we may describe the disposition as *active*, even though it is not in the process of being manifested. This is an important category when we come back to consider dispositional emotional states. If you are frightened by a face at the window you are disposed to express this in certain ways; but you may be able to control these manifestations and maintain a calm exterior. You are in the grip of the emotion, to use Pitcher's phrase, but not manifesting it in characteristic expressive behaviour. In this situation we would describe your emotional state of being frightened as active even though nothing is being manifested.

⁴ Arguably, dispositions must have some sort of robustness; they persist unless something interferes with this persistence. So, the reverse electro-fink is interfering with the working of some disposition after all, but not the disposition to conduct electricity; it is interfering with the disposition of the conductivity to persist.

So there are three possible ways to be frightened of something or angry with somebody. Your fear or anger might be dormant; you are calmly thinking of something else but haven't stopped being frightened of your neighbour's dog or angry with your father. Second, your fear or anger might be active but not being manifested because it is being counteracted by some effort to resist or control the manifestation; so you are keeping a calm exterior while raging inside. Thirdly, your fear or anger might be in the process of being manifested; you are screaming, running, shouting, fighting, etc.

My claim in this paper is that all three of these involve one and the same dispositional state. The difference is the degree to which the conditions that activate that state are being realized. We can see this by considering the example of a car's engine having the disposition to propel a car at 100 mph. There are various operational conditions like the ignition being on, there being petrol in the tank, and so on, and when any of these are not satisfied the engine's dispositional state is dormant. It doesn't stop being disposed to propel the car at 100 mph just because it is not currently doing it. When all these operational conditions are satisfied and the car is being propelled at 100 mph the engine's disposition to propel the car at 100 mph remains the same, but now it is in the process of being manifested. Now suppose that the car's progress is being blocked by a brick wall. The engine might be racing and the wheels skidding, but the car is not being propelled forwards. Again, the dispositional state of the engine remains unchanged. It is no longer dormant, but it is not being manifested by the car being propelled at 100 mph.

3 Second-order dispositional states

As I mentioned before, some authors—e.g. G.F. Stout, Lyons, Deonna and Teroni, Prinz and Ben Ze'ev—treat the dispositional state of being angry with someone as a disposition to become actually angry with them, and, so, not as such itself to be actually angry with them. It is true that we do have dispositions to go into certain emotional states, but such second-order dispositions are not themselves emotional states. Actual dispositional emotional states are dispositions to manifest or express emotions rather than dispositions to have emotions. An aspect of the Stout/Lyons/Wollheim conception of emotions is that character dispositions like irascibility or kind-heartedness are put in the same category as the emotional states you may be in when fast asleep or calmly feeding the cat, like being still angry with your son for crashing your car or being sorry for a distressed friend. They are all taken to be dispositions to go into actual emotional states. Deonna and Teroni describe the case of Leonard being angry with Nina even when he is not in her presence and so not in the grip of anger. (Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 8) They describe this as an 'affective disposition' and lump it in with character dispositions like being kind-hearted, frivolous or honest. But being kind-hearted is not an emotion, whereas being sorry for your friend is.

Being a jealous person is having a character trait of easily becoming jealous. You might be a jealous person without at that moment actually being jealous of someone. Similarly, being easily frightened, being kind-hearted, or being someone who gets angry with people who deserve it are all examples of having dispositions to go into

certain emotional states in certain circumstances. If we accept Aristotle's characterisation of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, then virtue is also a character trait—a disposition to have the right sorts of emotions in the appropriate circumstances. But some moods too are second-order dispositions. For example, irritability might be quite transient and so not a character trait; but while you have the mood you are disposed to become angry at trivial things.

So we can add an extra layer to the picture of emotions that I am developing. The extra layer, including some character traits and moods, is that of having dispositions to form certain emotions—i.e. having second-order dispositions. We may call this top layer *emotional sensitivity*, and it is critical not to confuse this with the emotions themselves. For example, when the father becomes angry with his son for taking and crashing his car this onset of anger is itself a response manifesting a second-order disposition of emotional sensitivity. That second-order disposition might be described as irascibility if it is somehow excessive, though in the situation described by Lyons one might think of it as appropriate (virtuous) emotional sensitivity. While the second-order disposition is manifested by becoming angry, the first-order disposition of being angry is manifested by various expressions of anger.

Consider another of Lyons' examples: "That I am afraid of Alsations [German Shepherd dogs] is true although I am writing at my desk. If an Alsatian suddenly appeared I might be plunged instantaneously, reflexly, into a state of fear." (Lyons, 1980, pp. 88–89) Is Lyons saying something about a disposition to be afraid—a second-order state not of actual fear but of being disposed to become frightened when Alsations appear suddenly? Or is he describing an actual state of fear of Alsations—albeit a dispositional state? If what he is saying is equivalent to saying that he *gets* frightened or *would get* frightened by Alsations he is clearly describing a second-order disposition to become frightened when Alsations appear and not describing his actually being frightened of anything. This is like saying that I get sleepy after a large meal; I don't have to be actually sleepy for this to be true. I am not actually afraid of brain-eating zombies attacking me *en masse*, but I would get very frightened if brain-eating zombies were attacking me *en masse*.

Othello, being a jealous man, *gets* jealous easily. This means that his being a jealous man is a second-order disposition. When actually jealous of Desdemona, even when fast asleep, it is true of him that he gets violent with Desdemona; he is disposed to express his jealousy of her. This is a first-order disposition. When actually smothering her to death with a pillow he is still jealous of her, but now that jealousy is being manifested in jealous behaviour.

4 What could be meant by an occurrent state?

When a disposition is being manifested something is happening—an occurrence. And while something's disposition is being manifested that thing still has that disposition. This may be obscured by focusing on manifestations that are almost instantaneous, like the shattering of a fragile glass. But even in such a case, there is a period of time—a very short period—during which the glass is in the process of shattering. And during that period the glass is disposed to shatter; after all, it doesn't stop shattering halfway

through. In other cases it is more obvious. A copper wire that has the disposition to conduct a current does not lose that disposition when the potential difference is applied across it and a current starts to flow. The wire retains its conductivity while it is conducting.

With dispositional emotional states it is the same. If the father, while calmly feeding the cat, was angry with his son for crashing his car and then his anger gets triggered by something, he manifests that dispositional emotional state, perhaps by jumping up and down on his hat. But he still has the disposition to manifest his anger with his son for crashing his car, even while he is in the process of manifesting it. He no longer *merely* has the disposition; but he still has the disposition, otherwise he wouldn't keep going. So, if there is a sense in which someone might be angry with his son for crashing his car when calmly feeding the cat, then he is angry with his son for crashing the car in precisely the same sense when boiling up with rage or jumping up and down on his hat.

The question then is whether in addition to being angry with his son for crashing the car in this sense he is also angry in a different sense. Is he 'occurrently' angry in addition to being dispositionally angry? Lyons, Ben Ze'ev and the others use the phrase 'occurrent state' to describe what they take to be the active emotional state as opposed to dispositional emotional state. But it is not obvious what could be meant by the odd phrase, 'occurrent state', which on the face of it is surely an oxymoron; occurrences are not states.

When a disposition is being manifested, something is going on; and the manifesting of that disposition is an occurrence. As I said, the dispositional state remains in place during its manifestation. For example, the copper wire is conducting a current—an occurrence—and at the same time the copper wire has the disposition to conduct a current. But in what sense is there also an occurrent state that the copper wire is in? We might say that the copper wire is now in the state of *active* conductivity; but all this means is that its dispositional state of conductivity is active—i.e. it is in the process of being manifested or at least would be if the manifestation were not being counteracted. Before the potential difference was applied across the wire its dispositional state of conductivity was dormant; after the potential difference is applied, the dispositional state of conductivity becomes active. There isn't anything else in addition to the dispositional state and the manifestation of that state.

We might reasonably take the phrase 'occurrent state' to refer to the dispositional state when it is in the process of being manifested—i.e. an occurrent state is an active dispositional state. But this doesn't capture what those philosophers who use this phrase (with the exception of Pitcher and possibly Deonna and Teroni) are after. Gary Bartlett (2018), in an analysis of what those philosophers who use this phrase *are* after, makes it clear that they are treating the distinction between occurrent and dispositional as an exclusive one (2018, p. 6); no state can be both occurrent and dispositional. Given this assumption, if someone jumping up and down on their hat in an angry rage is in an occurrent state of anger, it follows that they are not in the same state they were in when calmly feeding the cat; and this is what I am challenging. So the damage, as far as I am concerned, is done by introducing this odd conception of an occurrent state into the analysis.

My claim is that the transition from being in a dispositional emotional state to being actively emotional is not a transition from one state to another, but is a transition from

one's emotional state not being active to the same (dispositional) state being active. And this claim can't be rejected on the basis of a question-begging assumption that there is an exclusive distinction between occurrent and dispositional states.

Bartlett himself argues that the best way to understand the idea of an occurrent state is that it is an active state, but he insists that active states are not dispositional states. He starts off with a neutral conception of an active state, which is as follows: "A thing is active (or in an active state) when it is changing in certain salient properties over time." (2018, pp. 11–12). There is nothing about this conception that rules out the possibility that something is both in an active state and in a dispositional state at the same time. And it makes perfectly good sense to describe something's dispositional state as itself active when the activity of the thing is the manifesting of that disposition—as in the conductive wire conducting electricity. But Bartlett follows this up with a subtly different claim: "Occurrent [for Bartlett this means 'active'] states just are mental states which consist in the fluctuations of certain properties." And he goes on to say that "occurrent states are processes" (2018, p. 13). The switch he makes here is from taking a thing to be in an active state when it is undergoing a process to taking the thing's active state to be that process.

While we may indeed sometimes make this switch between processes and states in describing people, it is an unnecessary blurring of a quite proper distinction. If I ask the man who is jumping up and down on his hat what he is doing, it would be an inaccurate response for him to say that he is being angry with his son for crashing his car. When we see him jumping up and down on his hat we can see that he is angry with his son for crashing the car, but the jumping up and down is not the anger as such; rather it is the way the anger is revealing itself.

Matthew Soteriou has a slightly different way of understanding occurrent states as active states. Rather than identifying an occurrent state with a process he defines an occurrent state as one that constitutively depends on some process. For Soteriou an occurrent mental state is a mental state "whose obtaining *constitutively* depends on the *occurrence* of phenomenally conscious events/processes in the stream of conscious sensory experience" (Soteriou, 2013, p. 138). If it makes sense to attribute such states of mind to people, then it is certainly true that the 'occurrent state' the father is in when jumping up and down on his hat is not a state he was in when calmly feeding the cat.

But this just looks like gerrymandering unless there is some reason to think that when we describe people as being in certain emotional states we are describing them as being in such occurrent states. Is there any reason to think that when we describe someone as being angry with their son we are attributing to them a state whose obtaining constitutively depends on any occurrences happening? Perhaps there would be if we described them as hopping mad or boiling with rage. Arguably these are states rather than occurrences, and states that one can only be in if certain emotional responses or feelings are occurring. But being hopping mad with one's son for crashing one's car is just the state of being angry with one's son for crashing one's car when that state is manifesting itself in some expressive behaviour like hopping up and down. The state might be thought to be distinct from the dispositional state of being angry with one's son, but arguably only because it involves that dispositional state plus this extra active component of that disposition being manifested.

Consider conductivity again. The copper wire's dispositional state of conductivity may, when triggered, become the state of active conductivity. In a sense it is in a different state now. But what it is for it to be conductive is exactly the same as before. The extra element to its state—namely that it is now manifesting its conductivity—is not a different kind of conductivity; it is something in addition to its conductivity.

The point of this section may be put very simply. Whether or not an occurrent emotional state is understood in such a way that it cannot at the same time be a dispositional emotional state, someone in an occurrent emotional state is in precisely the same dispositional emotional state they were in before. When we describe them in both cases as being angry with their son for crashing their car it is that dispositional state that we are describing them as being in. That is why it is better to talk about active states rather than occurrent states. Active and dormant emotional states are both dispositional states.

The position that I am attacking takes dispositional emotional states to be manifested by going into active or 'actual' emotional states. Lyons, as already quoted, describes his father's dispositional anger as his being "liable or prone to get into actual emotional states of anger" (1980, p. 54). And G. F. Stout describes a dispositional emotional state as a tendency to feel a certain kind of emotion in the presence of a certain kind of object." (1899, p. 299) Now that we have in place the possibility that a dispositional emotional state may itself be an active state we can see how to avoid this position. If something has a disposition to manifest some result and that disposition is triggered, it will go into the active state of manifesting its disposition. It might seem to follow that going into the active state *is* the manifestation of the disposition. But we can now see that this does not follow. The fragility of a glass is its disposition to shatter in certain circumstances. It is not its disposition to go into an active state of fragility in those circumstances, even though it will indeed go into such an active state when it is manifesting its fragility by shattering. Similarly the father's anger with his son for crashing his car is manifested by his jumping up and down on his hat; it is not manifested by becoming angry with his son in a new and active way.

5 Subjectivity

Richard Wollheim (1999, p. 9) argues that dormant mental dispositions, like Hamlet's being angry with his mother or Macbeth being frightened of Banquo's issue, have psychological reality but no subjectivity; there is nothing it is like to be in one of these states, according to Wollheim. Since active emotional states do have subjectivity—it feels a certain way to be in the grip of anger—it seems to follow that active emotional states are different states from dormant emotional states.

But this argument is no good. A dispositional emotional state does not feel like anything when it is dormant, but does when it is active. It does not follow that the active state is not the very same state as the dormant one. And it does not follow from the fact that there is nothing it is like to be in a dispositional state while it is dormant that there is nothing it is like to be in a dispositional state.

But it might be thought that, in virtue of having a phenomenal quality, active emotional states are different states from dormant ones. They are phenomenal states,

somehow existing in a realm of conscious feeling; and dormant emotional states aren't. What this thought appeals to is a particular conception of consciousness, but by no means a conception we have to accept. In simple terms there are two main approaches to consciousness. The 'qualia' approach takes conscious states to have an intrinsic phenomenal nature. On the other hand, the 'higher-order' approach takes what is conscious about conscious states to be something extrinsic to them; conscious states are states that one is consciously in.⁵ Given the qualia approach active emotional states must be distinct from dormant ones. But this isn't a necessary consequence of the higher-order approach.

Emotional states become conscious when active—i.e. when either they are being manifested in emotional behaviour or this manifestation is being counteracted by some conscious or unconscious control. In general, you are aware of dispositions and powers by interacting with them—testing them, either consciously or unconsciously. You can become aware of someone's strength by arm-wrestling them or of the weight of a stone by lifting it.⁶ If you lift a stone, either deliberately or accidentally, you resist its weight and in so doing become aware of its weight. In the same way, you may become aware of your own dispositions by resisting them, either deliberately or automatically. You might have a passionate or loving inclination to touch someone which is felt in direct proportion to how much effort you need to resist it. Or you may feel like jumping up and dancing, and even though you decide not to, the inclination remains and is felt inasmuch as you stop yourself from letting it take you over.

The resistance that gives this sort of character to emotional dispositions when they are felt need not be intentional or conscious. I might feel like crying and *not* decide not to, but due to decades of self-control be quite unable to stop myself from resisting the inclination. I am blocking the inclination despite myself. I can feel the inclination and I can feel a sort of internal battle raging between that inclination and something in me resisting it.

Nico Frijda picks out the point about resistance being part of the phenomenology of felt emotional dispositions very clearly.

Emotion – outwardly manifest emotion, but equally emotion as experienced – is to be considered the product of excitation of action tendency on the one hand and inhibition of that same action tendency on the other. What is observed as felt depends upon the balance between these two. (1986, p. 405)

Treating your feeling a disposition as an active process of becoming aware of it through resistance or some other interaction chimes with enactivist approaches to perception generally. But it is important not to lose sight of the fact that experiencing feelings is rarely deliberate and usually seems entirely passive. Resisting the weight of a stone or the force of a bodily inclination is not usually something you do in order to

⁵ The qualia approach is championed by, for example, Chalmers (1996) and the Higher-Order approach is championed by, for example, Rosenthal (1986).

⁶ This reflects the approach to perception of Merleau-Ponty and his followers, who take perception to be an active process of interrogating the environment. See Merleau-Ponty (2012 edition) and Gibson (1966). Gallagher (2004) and Reddy (2008) develop the thought that similarly we can be directly aware of another person's emotional state by interacting emotionally with them. I develop this approach in Stout (2010) and (2022).

investigate the weight or the inclination. Nor even need it be something you are aware of doing. You may not have meant to resist the weight of the stone, but in carrying it around with you, even by accident, you felt its weight. Similarly when a slavering barking dog leaps out at you on a lonely mountain path [to use Christine Tappolet's (2016, p. 7) example], you may not have meant to resist the impulse to scream; your body did all the resisting for you automatically. But in the process you really felt that impulse.

Moreover in neither case does the resistance have to be successful in order to feel the inclination or power. If I can't carry the stone or can't stop myself screaming I may still feel the force of these inclinations or powers in an interaction with it that fails to stop it. Suppose I feel really jittery and cannot stop myself from jittering. There is a feeling here that would be lacking in a case of being really sweaty and not being able to control myself from sweating. The feeling arises because I do have some capacity to interfere with the jittering, even though attempting to exercise this capacity on this occasion fails to block the inclination to jitter. Indeed, I don't have to try very hard to resist an inclination in order to interact with it sufficiently to feel its force. A very minimal resistance to my disposition to scream is sufficient interaction to make me aware of it.

6 Instantaneous emotional responses

The claim I am defending is that an active emotional state and a dormant emotional state are the same dispositional state, the only difference being that an active emotional state is the dispositional state in the process of being manifested or that would be in the process of being manifested if its manifestation were not being counteracted. But there is a familiar observation that seems to challenge this claim directly. It is that emotional responses are often instantaneous responses to something happening in the environment. When a dog leaps out at you on a lonely mountain path you are instantaneously terrified. You don't need a dispositional emotional state to be there and to become manifested for this to happen. Your fear is unmediated by any such state. This observation might suggest that it is absurd to think of active emotional states as being dispositional emotional states in the process of being manifested.

We can explain this observation about instantaneous emotional responses—by noting that it is possible for dispositional states to be manifested from the moment they obtain. We should suppose in the case of the scary dog that a disposition to express fear is the direct response to the situation after all, and that it is manifested straightaway. So in response to the scary dog you become disposed to manifest fear, and even though the manifestation of fear seems like an immediate response to the scary dog it is in reality mediated by this dispositional state.

Dispositions sometimes last just as long as their manifestations. Consider closing a switch on an electric circuit which includes a battery and a light bulb. By closing the switch you enable the circuit to carry a current. It is now in a dispositional state that it was not in before. But, simultaneously, it manifests that disposition by carrying a current and illuminating the light bulb. Something is happening—a current is passing through the circuit lighting the bulb. It looks as though the light going on is a direct response to the switch being closed, but in reality it is a manifestation of a dispositional state that is the direct result of the switch being closed. When the switch is opened (i.e.

turned off) the circuit loses that disposition and the current stops flowing at the same time. Nevertheless there is still a clear distinction between the dispositional state and the process of current flowing. If the battery runs down, the closed circuit still has the disposition to carry a current even though it is not manifesting that disposition.

Suppose one becomes embarrassed due to doing something incredibly stupid in public, and suppose one blushes immediately. The blushing may look like a direct response to having done something incredibly stupid in public rather than a manifestation of some embarrassment that is the direct response. But even here where the two things occur simultaneously, it is important to maintain the distinction between becoming embarrassed and the blushing response. You might learn to control your blushing and become embarrassed without manifesting it in this way. Also you remain embarrassed even after you stop blushing. You would blush again when reminded of your behaviour. So, although you may not need a trigger in addition to having done something embarrassing in order to blush in the first place, it is nevertheless possible to cause a blush later with just such a trigger. And this shows that there is a state that you are in as a response to having done something stupid in public, which is then immediately manifested by blushing.

In the example of the episode of intense fear of a dog, suppose you get out of range of the animal and calm down. You may still be frightened of the dog even though that state of mind is a dormant one and you are not manifesting fear. If you suddenly realise that you have to go back past the dog to retrieve something you left behind, the very same fear is manifested again; it never went away. The encounter with the dog put you into a new state of mind; it did not merely generate a startled reaction. And it is natural to describe that new state of mind as the state of being frightened of that dog.

7 Conclusion

I have been defending the idea that all emotional states are dispositional states and that you are in exactly the same emotional state whether it is active or dormant, whether it is felt or not. The difference between being actively angry with someone and being non-actively angry with someone is not a difference in your state of anger, but is an extrinsic difference—namely whether the operational conditions for the realization of that state are met and the anger is in the process of being manifested or at any rate would be if that manifestation were not being counteracted in some way. I have suggested that one is in a *felt* emotional state when one is counteracting or in some other way interacting with its manifestation. In defending this ‘dispositionalist’ idea I am rejecting a very standard distinction in the philosophy of mind—that between dispositional mental states and occurrent mental states. If ‘occurrent’ in this context just meant ‘active’ that would be fine, but people using this distinction take occurrent mental states to be non-dispositional, and this is what I have been denying.

Although I have been defending this as an account of emotions, the same idea applies across the philosophy of mind—for example, with respect to beliefs and desires. Alvin Goldman argued that “standing wants and beliefs can affect action only by becoming activated, that is, by being manifested in occurrent wants and beliefs.” (1970, p. 88).

This is analogous to the position I have been arguing against—that dispositional emotional states are manifested in occurrent emotional states. But somehow Goldman's idea of an occurrent belief is more obviously questionable. Robert Audi (1994) has argued persuasively that one may have dispositions to form beliefs in certain ways, but also, and quite distinctly from this, one may have dispositional beliefs. Dispositional beliefs are not, as philosophers like Goldman had claimed, dispositions to have 'occurrent' or 'episodic' beliefs. As Audi puts it, 'occurrent' belief is belief where "the propositional object is in some way occurring to one." (1994, p. 420) The fact that the propositional object is occurring to me does not bring the belief itself into actuality; it just means that the belief is active. In the same way being angry with one's son while calmly feeding the cat is not manifested by a different state of being actively angry. When actively angry with one's son one is disposed to manifest the very same anger responses as when one is still angry with him despite calmly feeding the cat. The only difference is that in the former case one is in the process of manifesting those responses or counteracting this process somehow.

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