

Title:

Emotion, Placebo and World-Taking Cognitivism:

Overcoming Propositionality and Mechanistic Explanation

Abstract

1. Daniel Moerman (2002) and Fabrizio Benedetti (2014) have argued against prominent existing explanations for the placebo response that invoke (a.) conditioned response mechanisms or (b.) response expectancy, and instead propose the (c.) 'meaning response', suggesting we replace the term 'placebo response' with 'meaning response'.
2. A number of authors in the philosophy of emotions, making reference to the dispute between (neo-)Jamesians and cognitivists (Judgementalists and Appraisal Theorists) have invoked what one might depict as a "dilemma of adequate explanation", which emerges from the perceived inadequacies of both Jamesian and cognitivist accounts. For, as authors such as Deigh, Prinz, and Griffiths have argued, while cognitivism is strong on providing resources for explaining the meaningful content and intentionality of emotions, it seems weak on the trans-speciesality of many emotions: how some emotions can be common to humans and to some non-human animals. On the other hand, while Jamesianism is strong on the trans-speciesality of some emotions it is weak on meaning and intentionality.

Employing arguments that run parallel to those of Moerman and Benedetti, I argue that the "dilemma of adequate explanation" arises only because of an underlying commitment to propositionality. I propose a number of arguments that I suggest should lead one to abandon the commitment to propositionality in the philosophy of emotions. I then offer an alternative to propositionality. This alternative helps us avoid otherwise seemingly intractable problems in the philosophy of emotions, while respecting the data on the placebo (meaning) response and adding more philosophical detail to the proposals of Moerman and Benedetti.