



Not so new: overblown claims for 'new' approaches to emotion

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Motivation

- During the past decade, some philosophers and psychologists have argued that the conceptual resources of classical cognitive science cannot adequately account for certain important features of emotion. They have further argued that these features can be captured by non-classical forms of cognitive science. This may be termed the **non-classical thesis of emotion (NCE)**.
- Many statements of NCE are vague and are consequently difficult to assess.

Contribution

I analyse the structure of NCE, and discuss some of its typical shortcomings.

Structure of NCE

NCE may be characterised in terms of three lists and three claims, as follows:

Three lists:

1. A list of the conceptual resources of classical cognitive science
2. A list of the conceptual resources of (some form of) non-classical cognitive science, which includes at least some elements not found in List 1.
3. A list of the key aspects of emotion that require explanation

Three claims:

1. The newness of non-classical cognitive science (NNC): Members of list 2 that are not in list 1 cannot be reduced to any combination of the members of list 1
2. The explanatory weakness of classical cognitive science: Some members of list 3 cannot adequately be accounted for by the members of list 1.
3. The explanatory strength of non-classical cognitive science: The same members of list 3 enumerated in claim 2 can be adequately accounted for by the members of list 2 (either on their own, or in addition to the members of list 1).

None of the proponents of NCE goes so far as to provide exhaustive specifications of all three lists. Not only are their specifications partial, but they are not usually provided in the form of lists at all. Instead, their lists must be reconstructed from hints and ellipses, which makes criticism difficult

Conceptual resources, cognitive architectures, and cognitive models

It is important to note that NCE is not a claim about the existence of new models or theories of emotion, but a claim about conceptual resources. If a new model or theory of emotion accounts for hitherto refractory aspects of emotional phenomena, but can be entirely explicated by recourse to the conceptual resources of classical cognitive science, then the existence of the new model provides no support to NCE.

The current discussion would be better understood by cognitive scientists themselves (rather than by the philosophers of cognitive science who tend to dominate the discussion) if it were couched in the terminology of 'cognitive architectures' rather than that of 'conceptual resources'. A cognitive architecture is, in fact, a specification of the kind of conceptual resources that may be used to construct a set of consistent cognitive models. Classical cognitive science is perhaps best seen as a set of cognitive architectures (comprising Soar, ACT-R, and others), while non-classical cognitive science is a different set (comprising subsumption architectures, neural networks, dynamical models, among others). **For any pair of architectures, and any cognitive model, the cognitive model can always be programmed in both, or just the classical architecture - but never in the non-classical architecture alone.**

Summary and Conclusion

The classical and non-classical forms of cognitive science use different terms, but these differences do not reflect any deep conceptual rift, since there is nothing in non-classical explanations that cannot be translated into the terms of classical cognitive science. What is needed here is a theory of pragmatics, rather than a theory of deep conceptual structure. The use of different terms by different groups of cognitive scientists serves as a heuristic that directs their attention to different features of the phenomena being studied.