



Wednesday, June 25th, 11:30-12:00, room 301

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Experience and its continuous affective causation

Keywords: phenomenological experience, affective consciousness, kinetic-affective relations/energy forms, motive forces in social institutions, activity types, affective correlates of social roles

Several ‘cognitive systems’ are said to have evolved ‘in the lineage leading to humans’ (Talmy 2000 [1995]), but the search for the motive force that engenders such systems is still ongoing. In this paper I shall argue that neural theories that resort solely to the neurosciences (Lakoff 2006) without considering the role played by phenomenological experience do not live up to their declared objective. I will argue that the elemental core of phenomenological experience is affective consciousness. I will substantiate this claim by revisiting earlier work whose aim was to establish ‘the social’, as an institution (Searle 1995), and as the organizing principle of activity types (Goffman 1981 [1976], 1959). I will treat affect and directed emotion as a type of humanly shaped energy loads whose specifically human forms of energetic input is derived from ‘fundamental kinetic-affective relations [...] with respect to four basic emotions: anger, fear, affection, and desire’ (Sheets-Johnstone 2012).

Searle relegates such input processes into the ‘background’ of the ‘imposition of functions’ that rule and govern social life (1995). However, the pursuit of collective and individual goals within the experience of a reality that is organized as a locus of social order brings forth different activity types sustained by a differential affective causation and effecting the experience of different epistemic reality states (Schegloff 2007), each of them prompting new affective states that sanction the experience of ‘certainty’ which keeps the process going (Wittgenstein 1972 [1949-1950]). Affective correlates of social encounters thus have constantly visible ‘outward’ effects. Such correlates define and lay the foundation both of the rules of action, and the requisite social role categories (Goffman 1981 [1976]).

With the focus especially on Goffman’s work, I will argue that there are strong indications for affect and emotion to be taken as the humanly engendered motive forms of the energy forces that do indeed bring into being the social and individual coordinates of (the bodily navigated) human life. However, the causative force that motivates the firing of the neurons in human bodies cannot (logically) be viewed as a form of energy that is disconnected from the energy source that powers the expansion of the universe. Just, it comes in a human form, and as such is doubly processed as the foundational matrix of affect and emotion and as instrumental in the formation of social institutions.