

Taking affective explanations to heart

Within the commonsense picture of our affective lives, the concepts of emotion, mood, sentiment, character trait and temperament appear to play crucial and distinctive explanatory roles. Yet, while we feel that there are differences between these categories --- explaining a piece of behaviour by reference to sadness (emotion) is different from explaining it by reference to gloominess (mood) or pessimism (character trait) --- the truth is that the use of these terms is far from systematic in ordinary language. Some of these terms are sometimes interchangeable, they are ambiguous and, more generally, whether a given term denotes a character trait or a temperament, a sentiment or an emotion is far from clear, except maybe to a few philosophers.

Regarding these categories and their relations, recent philosophy has been concerned mainly with one question: Does anything really correspond to the category of character traits, and this independently of its manifest use in folk psychological explanations? We shall be taking all these affective categories seriously --- ignoring the recent and widespread scepticism vis-à-vis character traits --- and shall argue that, if they refer at all, they refer to distinct phenomena. This attitude, we believe, will shed light on the structure and complexity of our psychological explanations. At the end of our discussion, we will be in a position to trace the limits within which scepticism about character traits is warranted. Before reaching this point, however, our questions shall be the following: What important distinctions should be made within the affective domain? Which phenomena within this domain are dispositional and which are not? What are the relations between these phenomena?

We shall argue that emotions and moods are occurrent states that bear systematic and interesting relations to the other categories. Both ascriptions of character traits and sentiments, on the one hand, and ascriptions of temperaments, on the other, are ascriptions of dispositions. But the dispositions are different. Whereas ascribing *character traits* and *sentiments* (dispositions) is pointing toward a specific coherence and stability in the *emotions* (episodes) a subject is likely to feel, ascribing *temperaments* (dispositions) is pointing toward a certain stability in the *moods* (episodes) she is likely to feel. And, as will become apparent, the rationale for this distinction lies in the fact that, whereas appeal to character traits or sentiments in explanation is tantamount to making sense of a given behaviour in terms of a subject's specific evaluative outlooks and commitments, appeal to temperaments makes sense of it independently of any values or commitments she might have. So, even though psychological explanations in terms of sentiments, character traits and temperaments give final answers to questions about the reasons for which an agent performed a given action, they do so in different ways.

Our discussion is structured as follows. In the second section, we distinguish emotions from moods. The third section explains the relation between moods and temperaments as well as the distinctive role temperaments play in psychological explanations. In the fourth and fifth sections, we contrast this role with that played by character traits and sentiments and explain what tells these two affective phenomena apart. In the final section, we shall answer some of the queries and, no doubt, worries likely to have risen, and in so doing, we hope, reveal the full potential of our account.