



Title	What someone's behaviour must be like if we are to be aware of their emotions in it
Authors(s)	Stout, Rowland
Publication date	2012-06
Publication information	Stout, Rowland. "What Someone's Behaviour Must Be like If We Are to Be Aware of Their Emotions in It." Springer, June 2012. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-011-9224-0 .
Publisher	Springer
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/4971
Publisher's statement	The final publication is available at www.springerlink.com
Publisher's version (DOI)	10.1007/s11097-011-9224-0

Downloaded 2026-05-02 00:27:51

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)



© Some rights reserved. For more information

What someone's behaviour must be like if we are to be aware of their emotions in it

Abstract

Emotions are manifest in the behaviour that expresses them. This only makes sense if a piece of emotionally expressive behaviour is taken to be an Aristotelian process of manifesting or realising emotion. The emotions that are manifest in such processes can only be perceived if perception too is taken to be an Aristotelian process. I argue that on plausible assumptions about the nature of emotion this process must itself be one of emotional engagement with the subject of the perceived emotions. This gives us something like Gallagher's "Interactive Theory" of how we know other minds. The question remains as to how we can be aware of other people's emotional states when we are not interacting with them. The answer is that we are conscious of these emotions using the same interactive perceptual potentiality that we employ when we do engage with them emotionally, but we do not employ the full range of possibilities provided by that potentiality. For this answer to work it is essential that the 3rd-personal capacity to recognize someone's emotional state must be seen as a limiting case of the 2nd-personal capacity to be aware of someone's emotions by engaging with them emotionally.

§1

Introduction

I start with the assumption that emotional states are perceivable features of emotionally expressive behaviour.¹ The key thing about this assumption is that emotional states are taken to be *present* in this expressive behaviour. I will argue that the only way to make sense of this is to think of emotionally expressive behaviour in terms of a process of behaving and not as an event or sequence of event stages. In particular, emotionally expressive behaviour must be taken to be a *process* of the emotion, considered as some sort of potentiality, being realised. In that way we can see emotions as being manifest in its expression.

The picture to be rejected, if at all possible, is that of the mind lying behind the face, putting it into certain expressions as a result of its various states. This, I take it, leads to the various problems of other minds.² But there is at least something right about this picture. For the mind does animate the face. Being angry *causes* your face to screw up. So I think the problems may not arise merely from assuming a causal relationship between mind and behaviour, but instead from misunderstanding this causal relationship.

To see this I will present two competing models of how to construe causal relationships generally. One is a Humean model in which cause and effect are independent entities, and the other is an Aristotelian model in which the effect, in being a realisation of the cause, essentially involves the cause. I will argue that in the first of these there is no way to make sense of the idea of the cause being visible in its effect and that in the second there is. If we are forced by this consideration to prefer the Aristotelian model of the causal relationship between emotions and expressive behaviour, then we must think of emotional behaviour as a *process* of the realisation of an emotional potentiality and not as an *event*. It should be acknowledged that I

¹ This assumption is not only very natural but is also accepted by many philosophers. See Scheler (1973 editions), McDowell (1978, 136), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008), Stout (2010) and Smith (2010) for a selection. I will only consider here *emotional* states; but I have no doubt that the same claim can be made about other mental states too.

² See Avramides (2001).

present no argument here against someone who thinks they have a third way between Hume and Aristotle.

In the next section (§2) I will argue that there is a crucial metaphysical difference between these models as to the way causes and effects and the relation between them exist in time. In the Humean model cause and effect do not primarily have time-dependent properties but only timeless ones. Causation is itself a timeless relation in this model. Applying this to the causation of behaviour by emotion gives a conception of behaviour where neither the emotion behind the behaviour nor the behaviour itself is ever *on-going*.

This is important for my purposes because something can only be present to a person in a way that enables the person to be aware of it if it has time-dependent properties. That is because being aware of something is relating to it in a time-dependent way. When one is consciously aware of something one is aware of it at one time and then perhaps not at another time. I argue for this in §3. I then respond to the Humean objection that potentialities are never perceivable and argue that with a properly active conception of perception, of the sort recommended by philosophers like Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Alva Noë (2004) and psychologists like J.J. Gibson (1968), we can make sense of the idea of perceiving potentialities in their realisations.

In §4 I apply this to emotionally expressive behaviour. The active conception of perception combined with a conception of emotion as essentially communicative or expressive combined in turn with the Aristotelian conception of the relationship between emotion and emotionally expressive behaviour gives rise to a conception of the perception of emotions in others that has something in common with Shaun Gallagher's (2004) Interactive Theory of primary intersubjectivity. The idea is that we are aware of other people's emotions primarily by interacting with them emotionally – by jointly engaging in an activity of emotional expression.

In §5 I consider the natural objection that we very often seem to be aware of the emotions of others when we are in no position to interact with them emotionally. We might see someone expressing their emotions with someone else for instance. In response to this objection I offer up the hypothesis that we can be directly aware of

someone's emotions only by using a perceptual mechanism that has the *capacity* for emotional interaction even if on specific occasions that capacity is not being manifested. I argue that something like this is required of an account of perception that explains how we can be aware of physical objects rather than just of facing surfaces. We know these objects (and so are sensitive to them as physical objects) by means of a perceptual mechanism that includes the capacity to interact with them as physical objects even if on a particular occasion we are only glancing at an object and so not employing this capacity. Watching someone's emotions being expressed without engaging with them is analogous to glancing at an object.

§2

The metaphysics of events and processes

The dominant model of causation in the philosophy of action for the last forty years is described as the 'event-causal' model and is usually attributed to David Hume. Mental events or states or combinations of mental events and states do their causal work, and the result – a separately identifiable event or state - can then be perceived. For example the event of excessive exposure to the sun causes an event in the skin of burning and the state of the skin to be that of being sunburnt. Observing the sunburn enables one to infer that the earlier event of excessive exposure to sun took place, though one does not perceive that directly in the sunburn. Similarly one might observe someone's red face and infer that they were embarrassed.

An alternative model, which has recently been getting back a foothold in the philosophy of action,³ is described as the 'process-causal' model and is usually attributed to Aristotle. The mental state is the disposition, potentiality, mechanism or power. It is realised, actualised or manifested in a process of facial expression or other behaviour. What is perceived is not just the upshot of the process, but the process itself; you see the emotion playing out in someone's face. This is like perceiving someone's strength in their handshake. Their strength causes the firmness of grip but it is not some prior event or state that has to be inferred from it. The

³ See in particular Michael Thompson (2008).

strength is *present* in the handshake. The cause is manifest in its effect.⁴ In the first (Humean) model of the causal relationship between emotion and behaviour, we might think of the emotion as being an *input* into a process that results in the behaviour. In the second (Aristotelian) model the emotion is a disposition or potentiality whose realisation is the process of the behaviour.⁵

The distinction between these two approaches goes very deep. It is really a fundamental distinction between two ways of understanding the metaphysics of causation and at the same time the metaphysics of behaviour. We can illustrate this distinction by looking at the relatively simple causal process of the unimpeded motion of an object say a billiard ball – the *behaviour* of the ball travelling under its own momentum. In the Humean event-causal model this process is a series of successive positions of the ball – positions that satisfy an equation of motion that would be a special case of Newton’s First Law of Motion.

I want to argue that the series of positions of the ball at different times is not the sort of thing that has time-dependent properties, though it does have properties that relate to time. To illustrate this idea of a time-dependent property consider my currently sitting at a desk. The property of sitting at a desk is a property I have now. It is also a property that I may have at one time and not have at another time. In this way it is a time-dependent property. This is as opposed to timeless properties where we do not need to have an implicit or explicit reference to a time in order to take something to have such a property. The number 3 is timelessly a prime number; being a prime

⁴ As early as 1946 J.L. Austin describes this ‘manifestation’ of emotions in behaviour.

We never talk of ‘symptoms’ or ‘signs’ except *by way of implied contrast with inspection of the item itself.*” (1946, 177) ... ‘Symptoms’ or ‘signs’ of anger tend to mean signs of *rising* or *suppressed* anger. Once the man has exploded, we talk of something different – of an expression or manifestation or display of anger, of an exhibition of temper, and so forth. A twitch of the eyebrow, pallor, a tremor in the voice, all these may be symptoms of anger: but a violent tirade or a blow in the face are not, they are the acts in which the anger is vented. (Austin, 1946, 179)

⁵ This corresponds closely (though not exactly) with Fred Dretske’s (1988, 42 ff.) useful distinction between triggering and structuring causes.

number is not a time-dependent property. It might be alright, even though it would sound strange, to say that 3 is a prime number right now. But at any rate what is clear is that when we say that 3 has the property of being a prime number there is no need to fill this claim out by saying that it has this property now or perhaps at some other time.

Numbers and many other abstract objects do not have time-dependent properties. People and physical objects, like balls, do have time-dependent properties. People's lives or life stories on the other hand are like numbers; they do not have time-dependent properties. I had the property of being a child in the 1960s. Being a child is a time-dependent property. I did not have that property in the 1980s. My *life* has the property of spanning the 1960s, but it has that property timelessly. It is not that it had that property in 1965 and perhaps does not now. There is no need to specify a time in order to attribute that property. In a million years from now it will be just as true that my life spans the 1960s.⁶

While the ball has time-dependent properties the succession of its positions over time does not. The succession of positions spans a certain time interval (just as my life does) and it does so timelessly. Almost anything I say of that succession of positions will be true of it in a million years' time. The things that will be different are to do with its location in what McTaggart called the A-series.⁷ For example, such a succession of positions may be a *recent* event now but not in a million years' time. Right now, it may have happened ten minutes ago, but in two hours' time that will not be the case concerning it. But changes of an event's position in the A-series are not changes in that event itself but changes in what counts as the present moment. The

⁶ While I am taking the distinction between things which have properties timelessly and things which have time-dependent properties to be a metaphysical distinction between different sort of things, it might be possible to construe the distinction as one between different ways of picking out the same underlying metaphysical reality. For my purposes in this paper it would not matter if we took the latter route.

⁷ McTaggart (1909). The A-series locates events with respect to the present moment in time as being a certain time in the past, in the present or a certain time in the future, whereas the B-series locates them just as earlier or later with no reference back to the present moment. McTaggart argued that only by locating events in the A-series can we describe them in a way that involves real change. But the point I am making here is that if events are taken to be the things that may figure in a B-series description of history then putting them in an A-series does not get real change into the picture. Since they are not things with genuinely time-dependent properties they cannot really change (even though they can become closer and further away from the present moment).

transition from an event's being recent to its not being recent does not constitute a change that the event undergoes in that time.

If what is caused in a causal process is a Humean event – something like a succession of positions of a ball at different times – then the causal relation is itself timeless not time-dependent. Causation is then to be described by saying “ E_1 causes E_2 ” where “causes” is to be understood timelessly. It will be just as true in a million years' time that E_1 causes E_2 . As philosophers from Zeno to Russell and Whitehead and beyond have said, this conception of causation excludes real change or flux.⁸ We have changes in this model but no *changing*. What is lacking in the model is something *carrying* the billiard ball through these successive positions.

In the English language we would not use the progressive or continuous forms of verbs to describe Humean events. The suffix “-ing” is not applied to the verbs that describe them. A Humean event is something that will have *occurred*. But even if we are speaking at a time within the temporal interval of that succession of positions we do not describe it as *occurring*. That is because the continuous or progressive forms of verbs are used to assign time-dependent properties. If a process is correctly described as occurring then it may or may not be the case that yesterday it was occurring or tomorrow it will be occurring. If a ball is moving it may not have been moving yesterday and tomorrow it may not be moving. But a Humean event – a succession of positions of something at different times – is the sort of thing of which we can say that it will have occurred and not the sort of thing of which we can say that it will have been occurring. If the ball moved then it is always true of it that it moved.

The Aristotelian conception of motion on the other hand takes motion to be something that may be taken to have time-dependent properties, and thus be the sort of thing of which we can say that it is happening or will have been happening. Aristotle defines motion as “the actualisation of what exists potentially, in so far as it exists potentially” (*Physics*, 201a10-11). What Aristotle means by “actualisation” is the subject of much controversy. If we think of a potentiality as a condition sufficient for

⁸ See for example Whitehead (1929, 94-5).

a structure of results – in this case a succession of positions of a billiard ball at different times – then the actualisation of the potentiality is just that condition being realised.⁹ In the realisation of this condition the process is underway.

Assuming that the momentum of the ball is its potentiality for motion then on Aristotle's model the realisation of the ball's momentum is the process of its moving. Now it sounds right to say of the realisation of a condition (or of the actualisation of a potentiality) that right now it is resulting in certain things that it was not resulting in a few seconds ago. This is to attribute time-dependent properties to it. For example the realisation of the ball's momentum (its capacity for motion) is right now resulting in the ball reaching the cushion of the billiard table. But it is not right to say of a succession of positions of a billiard ball at different times that right now it is resulting in the ball reaching the cushion. The ball reaching the cushion is timelessly one element of that succession of positions

Aristotelian processes are things we can keep track of as they are happening. Humean sequences can only be identified in retrospect. By the same token, Aristotelian processes are things which can change over time, whereas Humean sequences only have properties timelessly. As Arthur Prior has argued we do want a conception of processes that allows for the possibility of their changing over time.

When we reflect further we realize that changes do change, especially if they go on for any length of time. (In this case we generally, though not always, call the change a process rather than an event ...) Changes do change – a movement, for example, may be slow at first and then rapid, a prizegiving or a lecture may be at first dull and afterwards interesting, or vice-versa, and so on. (Prior, 1968, 2-3)

§3

The metaphysics of the perceivable

⁹ Note this interpretation requires translating actualisation or realisation using a continuous form of the verb – i.e. as “*being* realised”.

This allows for the possibility that a process, like the motion of a ball, is something that one may be aware of. That something is being perceived is a time-dependent property of it. I may be aware of the motion of the ball at one moment and then not at the next. On the other hand, a succession of positions over time is not something that an observer can interact with, identify or perceive.

We have to be careful about a possible scope ambiguity in making this claim. If I am aware at one time of one thing and aware a moment later of something else and then aware of something else, and so on, then I have been aware of a succession of things. But it does not follow that there was a time at which I was aware of that succession of things. In virtue of being successively aware of each of these things I am aware of the succession of these things, but only in a timeless way. So it may be true that I *have been* aware of X without it ever having been true that I *was then* aware of X. I may have kicked a thousand footballs in my life but at no time did I kick a thousand footballs.

At no time is one ever currently aware of a Humean process – a succession of stages – even if one has been aware of each stage. But an Aristotelian process is the sort of thing that one may be aware of at a time. Moreover, if we accept the full Aristotelian picture of processes as potentialities being realised or manifested, then we can say that in perceiving a process we are perceiving the potentiality as well. If what we are aware of really is the potentiality being realised rather than just the effects of the potentiality being realised then we are aware of the potentiality itself in its realisation. If I am merely successively aware of the different positions of a ball in space at different times then I am never aware of whatever it is that is causing these positions to change. But if in being aware of its motion I am aware of the process of the ball's momentum being realised then I am as such aware of its momentum – its potentiality for motion.

But is it really possible to be aware of potentialities in their realisation? In seeing a billiard ball moving across a table isn't my experience just the same as it would be if I were watching a convincing stop-frame animation of a ball being in a succession of positions on the table? One might think that my perceptual mechanism is only sensitive to the results of the realisation of such a potentiality – i.e. the succession of

different positions at different times – and not to the existence of the potentiality itself. Certainly Hume thought so. Indeed this is part of his reason for taking a process to be nothing more than a succession of stages. If the power behind a process is completely invisible then it can form no part of an idea of that process.

Hume's central argument for the invisibility of powers has two stages. First he claims, with some plausibility, that in any single instance of observing a cause and effect we are unable to perceive the power in the former that results in the latter.

The first time a person saw the communication of motion by impulse, as by the shock of two billiard balls, he could not pronounce that the one event was *connected*: but only that it was *conjoined* with the other. After he has observed several instances of this nature, he then pronounces them to be *connected*. (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 7, part II)

Then Hume claims that repeated observations cannot reveal anything in the cause and effect not already perceived in a single instance of observation.

But there is nothing in a number of instances, different from every single instance, which is supposed to be exactly similar; except only, that after a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist. (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 7, part II)

So we cannot perceive the causal connection, according to Hume. And to the extent that powers or potentialities are supposed to constitute such causal connections we cannot perceive them. Instead, the repeated observations give us the sense of expectation. And it is from this sense that our idea derives.

The part of this argument I challenge is the assumption in the second stage of the argument that further observations just iterate the original observation, so that what we have to go on is only a series of observations. Perception is not like this. Successive observations explore and test. Perception addresses and interrogates the

environment. It does not just yield a series of impressions. Perception itself is a process (in the Aristotelian sense) – a process of interaction with the perceived object.

Hume's conception of perception as a process of passively receiving a stream of impressions has been forcefully undermined by the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and J.J. Gibson (1968).¹⁰

The eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin can orient, explore, and investigate. When thus active they are neither passive senses nor channels of sensory quality, but ways of paying attention to whatever is constant in the changing stimulation. In exploratory looking, tasting, and touching the sense impressions are incidental symptoms of the exploration, and what gets isolated is information about the objects looked at, tasted, or touched. The movement of the eyes, the mouth, and the hands, in fact, seem to keep changing the input at the receptive level, the input of sensation, just so as to isolate over time the invariants of the inputs at the level of the perceptual system (1968, 4)

Perception of an object, like a ball, is not just an impression received through a sense organ. Nor is it a series of such impressions. It is a process of orientating one's sense organs to that object, exploring it with these organs, and finding invariants and borders in it. Perceiving a power or potentiality is likewise a matter of engaging actively with that power, testing it through interaction. In the case of the momentum of the billiard ball, the simplest way to be aware of it is to put one's hand in the way, and as one's hand is pushed away to apply more or less pressure to feel for the impetus.

The central way to be immediately sensitive to the presence of a power or disposition is by interacting with it. You squeeze someone's hand in a handshake and feel their response; you are thereby aware of their strength. You try to pick up a rock and can hardly manage it; you are thereby aware of its weight. You try to persuade someone of something which they ought to accept and see how little they adapt; you are

¹⁰ Their active conception of perception has been developed by many philosophers and psychologists since. See in particular Susan Hurley (1998) and Alva Noë (2004) who describes this as an "enactive" approach to perception. Even though this approach is still controversial I am going to assume it is right for the purposes of this paper without any further argument.

thereby aware of their stubbornness. You try and fail to console someone and you are thereby aware that they are inconsolable.

By active, experimental, enquiring, interactive engagement with the world you become sensitive to the powers that this active process of perception is realizing in its object. The powers in the object are revealed by being realised by the perceptual process. It is precisely this active conception of perception that was lacking in the Empiricist tradition that found no place at all for the possibility of perceiving powers or dispositions. For Hume, qualities are imprinted on the mind in perception. All you have to do to get the impression of a quality is to have the respective sense organ functioning properly. Such things as the impressions of facial patterns might conceivably be imprinted on our minds that way (though I doubt it), but certainly not such things as someone else's anger or sadness.

§4

Interactive perception of someone's emotions

Emotions might be peculiarly well suited to be perceived in this interactive way. This would be the case if emotions were not merely potentialities for behaviour, but potentialities for *interactive* behaviour. In this section I will present some considerations in favour of this social conception of emotions, and argue that its acceptance is one way of motivating an interactive approach to emotional perception.

The central idea here is that emotions manifest themselves in *expressive* behaviour. And expression is communication; it is part of a collective process of getting some point of view shared. Although you can express emotions in complete privacy, this is very much the exception. Generally it takes two people for emotional expression to take place, and they have to be co-operating in a way for it to work. Expressing an emotion is like dancing or talking. You can do it by yourself if necessary. But the central case is of doing it with someone.

This may not be so clear in relatively emotionally repressed Western culture where you may wait until you are by yourself before bursting into tears, for example. But even for individuals for whom it is *normal* not to express emotions in public it may be

that the significance of emotional expression derives from its significance in interactive emotional expression. It is reasonably plausible that the most natural or primitive sort of emotional expression is within social contexts. We did not evolve a disposition to weep in order to express the tears to our stone pillows. And although emotional rationality is not simply constituted by evolutionary function it is somehow built on it. Part of the significance of emotional expression is that it is *natural*. This does not mean that it is now primitive or unsophisticated. It may be extremely refined. But it must have emerged in some way from our nature.

There is an alternative (Darwinian) conception of our nature as emotional creatures in which emotions have functions for *individual* rather than *social* behaviour. For example, fear is said to have had the function of preparing the individual for immediate flight rather than having the function of expressing the frightening/threatening nature of the situation to fellow creatures. But while it must be true that certain aspects of fear prepare creatures for flight, this cannot be the whole story. Why do we vocalise fear by screaming for instance? But certainly if it were the case that emotions have no expressive function then this part of my argument would be undermined, and I would have to fall back to a model of the perception of emotions which involved interaction of a non-social sort.

It is important to see that public expression of emotion is best thought of as expressing emotions *with* others and not as expressing emotion *to* others. There is a big difference between two people dancing to each other and two people dancing with each other. The kind of interaction in which emotions are expressed is more like the latter than the former. It is less a matter of watching a performance and then responding by doing a performance oneself and more a matter of doing something together.

Consider an example. Is your friend still grieving for their dead mother? You ask them a question about their mother; they have a catch in their voice; they give you a look; you give them a hug; they weep; you console them; they continue to weep; you suggest gently that it might be time to move on; they respond aggressively that you don't know what you're talking about. You can see that they are still grieving; you can feel it. It is there, apparent in the way they are responding to you. You can feel

its shape, its edges. And you do this by being part of a two person interactive emotional process.¹¹

In this example the observer must engage with the subject to be aware of their emotional state. And this engagement is itself emotional. The observer is not themselves independently grieving. But they are sharing in the grief of their friend. The two of them are grieving together. There are debates as to whether to call this engagement empathy or sympathy. But the crucial thing is that it is neither dispassionate theoretical observation nor does it require actually having or simulating the emotion itself. The observer may weep a little with their friend, but this is not the expression of their own grief (they have none of their own; *their* mother has not died). Of course the observer may be sad in their own right, where this sadness is independent of a joint emotional engagement. The sadness might continue after the two part company. But the grieving is something they do together (though they do not have to be in each other's company for the whole duration of the process). In sharing someone's grief you become party to its expression; what you share is the task of expressing that grief.

It should be noted that the fact that the engagement with the grieving person's process of manifesting their grief involves sharing the grief is neither necessary nor sufficient for the engagement to count as direct awareness of their grief. The wailing women walking at the back of a funeral cortege may have no awareness at all of the feelings of the person they are supporting. They might not even know who the grieving person is, but still want to share their burden of expressing their grief. Conversely, someone may be vividly aware of their friend's grief while feeling angry with them for still grieving after all this time. The engagement might involve some shouting rather than weeping, but it is still an emotional two-step between the friends in which the observer is consciously aware of the shape of their friend's grief, by bringing it out in various ways.

¹¹ See Peter Goldie (2011) for an account of grief as a process. Strictly speaking our claims are different since I am not describing grief itself as a process but only describing the expression of grief – the grieving – and the perception of grief as processes (indeed the same process sometimes).

Given this it is an interesting question whether the engagement must be emotional at all. Why couldn't an entirely unemotional interactive probing realize and thereby reveal someone's emotions just as well as an emotional one? I think the answer again depends on whether emotional expression is essentially part of collaborative emotional communication. It is plausible to think that emotional responses only make sense in a practice where all parties are playing the emotional game. An expressive move is not just a response to a situation, but also a response to a communicative elicitation, an elicitation that must itself be a piece of emotional expression. Certainly it is possible to realize someone else's emotional potentiality by a piece of non-emotional probing, but there is something pretty artificial about this interaction. It will not reveal the full emotional shape of the potentiality. I can make the angry person shout at me by applying some non-emotional trigger. Perhaps my very lack of emotional response will goad them into this action. But I can only make myself aware of the real shape of their anger by engaging emotionally with them, since their anger essentially involves a capacity to respond in a certain way to such emotional expression.

Shaun Gallagher has recently defended what he dubs the "Interactive Theory" of intersubjectivity, which has something in common with the account I am defending here.¹² He is keen to reject the empiricist idea of knowledge of other minds being based on inference from knowledge of their behaviour. Instead our knowledge of other minds is due to an empathetic perception where "we experience the other directly as a person, as an intentional being whose bodily gestures and actions are expressive of his or her experiences or state of mind." (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, 183)

Gallagher takes Interaction Theory to be at least partly a theory of the psychological development of our capacity for intersubjectivity in childhood. He hypothesises that interaction continues to be "our primary access for understanding others ... even after we attain theory of mind abilities" (2004, 204-5) While this certainly sounds plausible, I am more interested in something like Interaction Theory as an account of how it is even possible that we perceive other people's states of mind. Such states of

¹² See Gallagher (2004) and Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, chapter 9).

mind are only manifest in behaviour that constitutes the realisation of these states or potentialities. So sensitivity to these potentialities must involve the capacity to realise them yourself as the observer in an interactive process with the subject.

It is important to accept that the possibility of being directly aware of someone's emotions does not preclude the possibility of someone faking their emotions and the observer making a mistake. I might *think* I can see anger in someone's face and be mistaken, either because I mistake some other state – perhaps shame – for anger or because that person is trying to deceive me. This possibility does not show that when anger really is being expressed I might not be properly sensitive to its presence (although I couldn't be sensitive to its presence if I was always being mistaken about someone's anger). If we want to allow that people are consciously aware of things in the world around them – as of course we do – then we must make room for the possibility of people making mistakes about what they are consciously aware of.

§5

Perceiving emotions when not interacting

Given the Aristotelian conception of a process-causal relationship between someone's emotions and the expression of them and given an enactivist model of how such things are perceived we can see how it is possible to be directly aware of other people's emotional states through active engagement with them. On the social conception of emotion introduced in the last section this active perceptual engagement will itself be an *emotional* engagement. The puzzle now is not the Empiricist problem of other minds but rather how we can be directly aware of other people's emotional states when we are not directly emotionally engaged with them. For example how can I be aware of your anger as it manifests itself towards somebody else?

One move would be to say that one is only consciously aware of other people's emotions when interacting with them and at other times the best one can do is to work them out from what one is aware of. Certainly there is a difference in the way it feels between observing someone's anger towards someone else and observing it towards oneself. When directed towards oneself some sort of emotional response is called for.

But this phenomenological difference should not be exaggerated. It does not amount to the anger being present to one in one case while in the other all that is present is the way the person is behaving and the way their face is moving.

I seem to be conscious of someone's anger in just the same way when it is not directed at me even though the way I perceive it when it is directed at me is by interacting with it, and the way I perceive it when not is by watching it without interaction. If interaction is a specific mode of perception this is a puzzle.

Consider as an analogy the example of being aware of physical objects as physical objects.¹³ I am consciously aware of an apple when I look at it. And it is not just that I am consciously aware of something that happens to be an apple. I am consciously aware of it as a physical object. This means that I must be sensitive to its presence as a physical object. It would be a mistake to say that I am never aware of the apple as such but just of the visual appearance of an apple or of the visual surface that is facing me. This is akin to saying that I am never aware of someone's anger, only of their face distorting in certain ways. But if my relationship with physical objects were never more than allowing light from them to stimulate my retinas, then it wouldn't be a mistake to say that I am only aware of the visual surface or perhaps just of some appearance, since that is all I would be sensitive to. It is only because I am capable of interacting with the apple by orientating my eyes with saccades, focusing my eyes, shifting the position of my head, and so on, that I see anything as objective at all. And I think it is reasonable to say that I can only see the apple as a physical object, as opposed to merely seeing its surface, in virtue of the fact that I am capable of other interactions with it including poking it, picking it up, and manipulating it in various ways.

But none of this means that I have to be picking it up and engaging with it in this active way in order to be seeing it. What it means is that my sensitivity to the presence of the apple is by means of a perceptual capacity that is potentially manifest in all those active engagements with the apple. But this is compatible with that

¹³ Smith (2010) presents a useful alternative treatment of just this analogy.

capacity not being realised in all these multiple ways on any particular occasion of its realisation.

A planet attracts a body of mass 10 kg to it by gravitation. Now that gravitational mechanism would attract 20kg bodies towards the planet with twice the force, and so on for any massive body close to the planet. The mechanism that pulls the 10kg body to the planet is a mechanism with a general capacity to do a lot of other things than just to attract bodies of that particular mass in that particular location.

In the same way the mechanism that gives me knowledge of the presence of the apple is one that would engage in all sorts of other ways with the apple if required. This is so even if in the present case it only involves the subject glancing at the apple. The full range of the mechanism is not being employed when just glancing at the apple, but it wouldn't be a mechanism that provided knowledge of the presence of the apple (rather than just its visual appearance) if it were not a mechanism that had this larger range of possible moves available to it.

Someone recently paralysed can, I take it, still see apples and not merely facing surfaces of apples. The example is hard to interpret unequivocally because paralysis does not rule out the capacity for some active engagement with the object; for example, you can ask someone to bring it to you. It is also a moot point just when it would stop being the case for a paralysed person that the perceptual capacity you are employing is one that is potentially manifest in various active engagements with objects. But what is a clearer implication of this interactive approach to perception is that someone born without the capacity to interact with objects would never perceive the world as a world of physical objects (and this is something that empirical discoveries could conceivably refute).

Applying this back to perceiving someone's emotions in their expressive behaviour, I can be sensitive to someone's anger or grief without actually engaging emotionally with them so long as I am *capable* of the sort of emotional engagement that digs right down to someone's emotional core. The perceptual mechanism I employ to give me knowledge of their emotions is indeed sensitive to the actual presence of these emotions not just to the apparent presence of them, even though all aspects of that

sensitivity are not being manifested on this occasion. Watching someone's expressive behaviour without engaging with it is like glancing at that person's emotions.

The analogy of the paralysed perceiver of objects in the emotional case is the autistic or emotionally repressed perceiver of emotions.¹⁴ Again it is difficult to interpret this sort of case unequivocally for the same two reasons as applied to the paralysed perceiver. Firstly, someone may have a restricted capacity to interact emotionally with others but still have some capacity. We should not be too quick to assume a complete absence of this capacity in someone who merely fails to engage in a way that conforms to the subtle norms and cues that emotionally skilled participants are sensitive to. Also it is a moot issue whether or to what extent blockages to one's manifesting a capacity to engage emotionally with others mean that one does not have that capacity at all and is not employing it in one's observations. But it is a reasonably clear implication of the model I am presenting that someone who never developed any capacity for emotional interaction could be incapable of perceiving emotions in others, however good they might be at *working out* what emotions others were having (and again this is an empirically falsifiable aspect of my overall position).

There is an easily discernible difference between watching someone else's behaviour in a completely detached way as if watching the behaviour of an alien and watching someone's behaviour in an emotionally engaged way even when one is not actually engaging with it. In the former case one may try to work out what state that person is in from the peculiar moves that are appearing. In the latter case one is in touch with that person's feelings though not actually touching them. These processes feel quite different.

This difference corresponds to what Peter Strawson (1960) describes as the difference between adopting an 'objective' perspective and adopting a 'subjective' perspective when thinking about other people. Adopting the subjective perspective involves being ready to engage with someone by means of reactive attitudes like resentment. These are not just private emotional attitudes. They are attitudes that are manifested in social interaction.

¹⁴ See Gallagher (2004).

Adopting the objective perspective on the other hand involves treating that person as an object. For most of us the objective perspective is quite difficult to adopt when watching someone expressing their feelings. We have a perceptual mechanism with sensitivity to what someone is really feeling and to adopt the objective perspective we would have to employ a different perceptual mechanism that lacks that sensitivity. A psychologist might have reason to do this and so might an actor who wants to learn some new moves. In the same way an artist might just be aware of what is apparent at the surface of an object they are painting, but this is quite a refined perceptual skill.

If someone quite lacked the capacity to interact emotionally with others, even if they could mirror another's emotions or think theoretically about them, then they would indeed be stuck with the objective perspective. I take it that this person would never be aware of anyone else's emotions. Arguably they would not even know what it was for other people to have emotions. They could apply their psychological theories of behaviour or try out simulations of other people's ways of behaving, but the world of other people's emotions would remain forever hidden from them.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1946), "Other Minds", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 20, 148-87.
- Avramides, A. (2001), *Other Minds*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ayer, A. J. (1956), *The Problem of Knowledge*, London: Macmillan.
- Dretske, F. (1988), *Explaining Behavior*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Gallagher, S. (2004), "Understanding interpersonal problems in autism: Interaction theory as an alternative to theory of mind", *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 11:3, 199-217.
- Gallagher, S. and Zahavi, D (2008), *The Phenomenological Mind*, London: Routledge.
- Gibson, J.J. (1968), *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Goldie, P. (2011), "Grief: a narrative account", *Ratio* 24:34, 119-38.
- Hurley, S. (1998), *Consciousness in Action*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell (1978), "On the Reality of the Past" in Hookway, C. and Pettit, P. (eds.), *Action and Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McTaggart, J. (1908), "The unreality of time", *Mind* 17: 68, 457-74.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, (tr. Smith, C.) London: Routledge.
- Mill, J. S. (1865), *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy vol 1*, London Longmans.
- Noë, A. (2004), *Action in Perception*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Prior, A. (1968), *Papers on Time and Tense*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scheler, M (1973 edition), *The Nature of Sympathy*, (tr. Heath, P.) Hamden: Shoe String Press.
- Smith, J. (2010), "Seeing other people", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Review* 81:3, 731-48.
- Stout, R. (2010), "Seeing the anger in someone's face", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* sup. Vol. 84, 29-43.
- Strawson, P. (1960), "Freedom and Resentment", *Proceedings of the British Academy* volume 48.

Thompson, M. (2008), *Life and Action*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Whitehead, A. (1929), *Process and Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, (tr. Anscombe, G. E. M)
Oxford: Blackwell.