

The example of embarrassment or 'cringe'

Embarrassment is related to disgust and shame and is in the self-conscious group of emotions.[‡] Finding someone's behaviour embarrassing can lead to a feeling of painful withdrawal – the cringe – if they are someone with whom one has a connection. It is a very similar reaction to seeing someone

* This can be a problem in psychotherapy. Suggesting that a client might be angry about something can inadvertently make a client angry and, even if no criticism is intended, can be taken to be an annoying criticism. Mentioning shame in any connection can also be perceived as shaming.

† Socrates stood at the cusp of the supplanting of the sophists by philosophers. Sophists taught rhetoric: how to move people and win arguments that way. Philosophers thought that this was illegitimate (and also disapproved of sophists selling their teaching). Philosophy has ever since been a fountain of technical terms, designed to purge itself of connotations, but its success has been in proportion to the dry-as-dust nature of philosophical technical writing that only engages other philosophers.

‡ See Giner-Sorolla, Leidner, and Castano (2011) and Müller-Pinzler *et al.* (2015). The self-conscious group of emotions are said to depend on having self-awareness, i.e. a theory of mind (Heerey, Keltner, and Capps, 2003).

else get hurt, although it is not so bad that one feels nauseated. If the connection is a negative one, one might paradoxically feel pleasure of a kind, as happens when someone is humiliated by a practical joke that one plays on them. Embarrassment is, like shame, disgust, and panic, a highly contagious emotion. Embarrassment can easily be shared. Paulus *et al.*⁹ have shown that this is associated with the temporoparietal junction, a part of the interbrain-connecting apparatus, being active. So the theory-of-mind experience of embarrassment is to be aware of the discomfort of someone else and to keep their emotions at a distance from oneself by a 'cringe' or, at an even further distance, by malicious pleasure or Schadenfreude.

Shame and pride are considered self-conscious emotions because their experience presupposes some judgement of social status: inferior and marginalized in the case of shame; superior in the case of pride. So, to get the less-contaminated view of the experience of the theory-of-mind connection with other people, it will be important to neutralize any interbrain connection and also to minimize the impact of any difference in status.*

* The social phase I refer to is not the same as the biologically mediated phase, evident in a 'swarm' or crowd of people. Here I am referring to a sociality mediated by shared narrative. Its origins can be traced to Herder and then the folklorists who assembled narratives that exemplified the spirit of their nation, according to the romantic nationalism movement. In the late 19th century in Germany and Austria, this 'völkisch' movement led to a study of how culture mediated shared meaning and the separation of the sciences of reasons (Geisteswissenschaften) from the science of causation (Gesellschaften), partly in response to the rise of scientific psychology. Schutz (1967), for example, described four life worlds: the Vorwelt (the past); the Folgewelt (the future); the Umwelt; and the Mitwelt. The Mitwelt is the world of people we know things about, and the Umwelt, the world of 'consociates' or 'people who share a community of space and a community of time' (*ibid.*, p.186). Umwelt approximates to what I am terming a connection between minds that is mediated through a shared narrative, or Lebenswelt. Mitwelt is constituted by relations between people that do not involve knowing, as we would say, how the other person feels, but we can predict their behaviour on the basis of rules or social expectations of how they will react. Buber's 'I-it'

Why do people chat to each other? Oftentimes nowadays people will say that they do it because it's always good to keep connected or because they are networking, i.e. adding new connections to their network. Not many people, I suspect, would think that it's good to chat to everybody and anybody. There's a proscribed list for all of us, and chatting to people on that list might lead to joining it oneself. The list is not generally put together by a clerk; it's created by a variety of negative emotions, such as fear, anger, disgust, distrust, or dislike, or by social judgements that impinge on us via guilt, shame, vengefulness, opprobrium, or hatred. At bottom, it is the membership of our particular out-group that is on the proscribed list.

This out-group/in-group distinction arises from but is also constitutive of our empathy. It is apparent in the stranger anxiety that affects infants when they are about nine months old. It is present in the choice we make about: whether to smile with our eyes or just smile; whether we are gratified by someone's gaze or negative about it; whether our relationship with another person is 'I-thou' or 'I-it', to use Buber's distinction;¹⁰ and whether we feel disappointment at another person's joy or pleasure. It is so pervasive that it is useful to think of four, rather than three, modes of connection with other people: positive, negative, blocked, and untried. The out-group can be composed of people to whom any of the latter three modes of connection can apply. It can just mean people other than me, or people other than 'us',

relations belong in the *Mitwelt* and 'I-thou' to relations in the *Umwelt*. I have previously mentioned Rickman's idea that the infant develops from second-person relationships to third-person ones: from, as one might say, an *Umwelt* to a *Mitwelt*. Chisholm *et al.* (2014) provide a simple rule of thumb to distinguish these different connections. Second-person relationships (which they call first-person relationships) are marked by eye contact, i.e. by an interbrain connection; third-person relationships are not.

or it can refer to other people whose existence is so alien to us that it would require us to change our assumptions about the world. Levinas, in particular, is associated with the latter, for which he has coined a special term: their 'alterity', represented by the face of the Other.*

These dual perceptions of the world are deeply entrenched in many cultures, at many levels.¹¹ In many religions, the kindness of a beneficent God who means well to humanity is opposed by the power of a great enemy of mankind, who in monotheistic religions is often portrayed as an enemy of God herself.[†]

Secular theories of sociology have also been divided between consensus and conflict theories, with conflict theories becoming dominant towards the end of the last century.

In philosophy, Hollingshead has traced a metaphysical problem from Thales to contemporary philosophy that he summarizes as '[t]his bifurcation of the world into the mundane world perceived and the transcendent, "more real" world revealed by thinking'.¹²

Psychology has been strongly influenced by Freud's theory of unconscious conflict. Freud adopted and extended Nietzsche's theory of the unconscious as it applied to society, and the unconscious struggle of will against resentment, applying it to a different conflict, that between lust and shame.

* Gallagher argues that it is the (interbrain) connection with the other's face that adds this transcendent element (Gallagher, 2014).

† Christians call this great enemy Satan, and Muslims, Iblis. In Zoroastrianism Satan or Iblis, or whatever name this fallen angel or demon has, stirs up all of the negative emotions, especially strife, wherever he goes. In Hinduism, many of the gods have aspects of eternity and wholeness, on the one hand, and activity, and therefore conflict, on the other. So although Nagas are often thought to be devils, they are in some ways essential to the successful evolution of the universe.

Freud's take on Nietzsche was that it was the disruptiveness of sexual desire that constantly tried to break through the conventional ties of civilization – that was the cause of the conflict. But there were many other candidates. Darwinians thought it was the struggle to survive, one product of the chaotic processes of genetic variation leading to rival phenotypes. Marx thought that it was economic struggle for control over the means of production. Sartre thought that it might be over any scarce resource, and since there was always something that people desired to have but was in short supply, there would always be conflict.

The ancient Greeks imagined that each person's life was determined by the fates: one of whom was gathering together the threads of life, another was ready to cut the threads, and the third measured.

The Greek view of the fates puts life and death at the centre of existence, and one might argue that this is the fundamental conflict. In his later life, Freud, for example, became interested in an idea put forward by one of his analysands, Dr Sabina Spielrein,^{*} that there was a death instinct that opposed libido – the sexual and therefore the life instinct.

* One way to look at Dr Spielrein's life is that she was possessed of an unusually strong death instinct herself. She had been first the patient, then the research associate, and finally the mistress of one of the 20th century's best-known psychiatrists, Carl Jung. She subsequently became a correspondent and then a colleague of another, Sigmund Freud. But rather than these contacts leading to a long and successful career in Switzerland or Austria, she chose to return to her native Russia after being left by her husband. But the nursery that she founded in Moscow was shut down, amid allegations of wrongdoing that were almost certainly trumped up, and she went back to her hometown, Rostov on Don, to reunite with her husband who had been living with, and had had a child by, another woman. Her two brothers were arrested by the NKVD and died in a gulag. Her husband died, and she and their two children were shot in 1942 during a mass killing of Rostov Jews by the occupying Nazis.

Terrible as her life was, it is hard to see that Dr Spielrein was actively seeking death, and if she was, she chose a horribly painful route. We might say that it was a dreadful mistake to leave safe Switzerland to travel to a country where the intelligentsia were at risk of being killed by the secret service and, a few years later, the holocaust was going to burst over Eastern European Jews particularly. But that is to argue with the benefit of hindsight. In fact, we can never look ahead or aim at death, it seems to me, as it is a kind of nothingness. When people kill themselves, it is because life has become intolerable and not because they are wanting to possess death.

* This is a synopsis of a folk tale collected (in two versions) by Katharine Briggs (Anon, 2011).