
Must we mean what we do? – Review Symposium on Leys’s *The Ascent of Affect*

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University of Exeter, UK

Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017, 416 pages, ISBN: 022648856X

Interdisciplinary feelings

We live, so it seems, in an age in which negative feelings – anger, rage, resentment – have become powerful drivers of political change (see Davies, 2018). We also live in an age, within the smaller confines of the academy, in which the dynamics of affect, feelings, emotions, and the passions have become a renewed focus of concern. In the humanities and social sciences in particular, there has been a veritable ‘turn to affect’, animated in particular by frustration with the social constructionism associated with poststructuralist theories of discourse, language, and textuality, and involving the reassertion of the lively, embodied qualities of human life (see, for instance, Clough and Halley, 2007; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). Affect theory now finds itself the subject of profiles in *The New Yorker* (Hsu, 2019), confirming the sense that this strain of cultural thought sits alongside other zeitgeist-capturing fields of research such as cognitive science (MacFarquhar, 2018), neuroscience (Bilger, 2011), and neurophilosophy (MacFarquhar, 2014). In the critically inclined humanities and social sciences, the turn to affect is shaped by a clear moral imperative – affect is ascribed determinative causal force in theories that argue that political power works not through explicit persuasion, reasonable argument, or material incentivisation, but instead operates at a subliminal or sub-personal level where people’s embodied, affective responses are primed and triggered in advance of any rational, cognitive apprehension of interests, preferences, or

Corresponding author:

Clive Barnett, Department of Geography, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4RJ, UK.

Email: c.barnett@exeter.ac.uk

tastes (see, for example, Amin and Thrift, 2013; Massumi, 2015). Across otherwise different fields of inquiry, the turn to affect is associated with an anti-intentional stance when it comes to accounting for observable patterns of human behaviour.

It should be said that there are different varieties of affect theory on the market these days. Some versions, for example the work of Lauren Berlant (2011), draw on and extend well-established traditions of literary scholarship concerned with the emotional effects of poetry and prose on readers that stretch back through Paul de Man to I. A. Richards. There is, however, also a strong strain of scientism running through cultural theories of affect. Specific fields of scientific research, most obviously neuroscience and psychology, are often presented as the external reference points that legitimise strong claims about the fundamental dynamics of human action. In contrast to the idea that scientific research can serve as the source for settled findings about the dynamics of human behaviour, Ruth Leys's *The Ascent to Affect* recounts how the sciences of emotions have been shaped by arguments about experimental design and empirical methodology, as well as by particular conventions of criticism and debate. Knockdown appeals made to the apparently irrefutable evidence of neuroscience or experimental psychology take on a different hue when the internal controversies of these fields are restored to view. Leys's book draws into view and challenges the rhetorical appeal of naturalist accounts of emotional life, thereby raising much broader questions not just about the validity of particular fields of research, but about practices of interdisciplinary inquiry more generally. And she pinpoints how the empirical is necessarily framed by conceptual schemata and philosophical assumptions. This is often forgotten in the standard procedures of interdisciplinary exchange, with the result that existing hierarchies of status within and across disciplines often remain unquestioned (see Callard and Fitzgerald, 2015). The relevance of Leys's book for the humanities and social sciences lies in part in its demonstration that the authority of arguments concerning the primacy of the affects over rationality cannot be secured by appeals to the external authority of experimental psychology or neuroscience.

The Ascent of Affect includes a sustained critique of the selective appropriation of the sciences of emotions in the humanities and social sciences – Chapter 7 of the book is an extended and revised version of Leys's earlier critique of affect theory in *Critical Inquiry* (Leys, 2011; see also Wetherell, 2015). But the rise of affect theory is also associated with a broader shift in the humanities and social sciences towards theorising in an ontological register – that is, towards forms of theoretical debate in which arguments centre on claims about the very nature of existence. The turn to affect is, then, often characterised by the strong assumption that *science* can serve as the source for *ontological* truths that can ground fields of inquiry that then are able to generate authoritative interpretations of contemporary events without much need for sustained empirical analysis. It is here that I would want to locate the significance of Leys's book. It crystallises a fundamental division between two different ways in which 'being philosophical' is imagined to be part of the vocation of the human sciences. Affect theory stands as one example of a style of cultural theory in which being philosophical has come to mean being able to make grand claims about reality that appear to have strong ontological status. By contrast, Leys's work exemplifies a strand of work that holds to the importance of more ordinary modes of philosophical imagination to social analysis, where the

term *ordinary* refers to a series of traditions that hold that the vulnerability to doubt of our assumptions and practices is the very condition of human action (see Barnett, 2017: Chapter 2).

The concern with using philosophical concepts to throw the ordinary intuitions about human action into new perspective, rather than to build grand ontological frameworks, is associated with a particular methodological stance. As the subtitle of her book indicates, Leys's concern lies not just in criticising scientific fields and their appropriation, but primarily in the genealogical reconstruction of the fields of science that are often invoked as sources for authoritative ontologies of affect and embodiment (see also Koopman and Matza, 2013). That is, rather than seeking external legitimacy from science for the development of grand ontological concepts of affect, of desire, of embodiment, Leys is concerned with tracing the ways in which emotional states have become the objects of inquiry (and public dissemination) through the combination of experimental designs and conceptual schema. I take it that the aim of such genealogical reconstruction is not, to borrow a phrase from the philosopher Bernard Williams (2002), necessarily meant to be 'disobliging' – showing that scientific findings have a history does not require that one should stop believing in them. Rather, by restoring to view the contingencies, disputes, and conflicts surrounding particular fields of scientific inquiry, Leys's genealogical method affirms that most scientific of values – the fallibility of research findings.

Eschewing the ontological trumping that has come to characterise cultural theories of affect and nonrepresentational social theory, Leys locates claims about affect, emotion, and feeling within broader philosophical debates about the relationship between normativity and naturalism (see Pippin, 2009). In so doing, she makes clear her view that the key issue at stake in debates about affect, across diverse fields, is the status and value of the concept of intentionality (see also Zerilli, 2016). At the centre of her genealogy of contemporary sciences of mind, emotion, and embodiment is the long-standing philosophical problem of how to make sense of the fact that emotions are *about* something – the sense that they involve the cognition of objects and therefore necessarily raise questions of meaning. Leys frames the problem of the intentional status of mental states with reference to the debate between John McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus over rationality, mindedness, and how best to interpret the relations between non-conceptual and conceptual dimensions of action (see Schear, 2013). The central disagreement between McDowell and Dreyfus revolves around whether, and how, the contents of perception of an acting subject are available for conceptual understanding. McDowell stands for a position in which human perceptual experience is 'conceptual all the way out', in the sense that it can be apprehended by conceptual reasoning of the sort involved, for example, in forming judgements. Dreyfus, by contrast, holds that a great deal of action involves skilful, absorbed coping that depends on non-conceptual forms of experience that are not available for conceptual elaboration. As Leys puts it, this debate is about 'how to characterize the kinds of embodied copings that nonhuman and human animals exhibit when they negotiate their relations with the world and others in a highly skilled and apparently "automatic" fashion' (p. 229). At its simplest, this debate is a version of an older dispute about just how to imagine the relationships between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'.

Doing without knowing

The problem of understanding the intentionality of emotions is central to the conundrum that frames a whole series of contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind, neuroscience, and psychology, as well as a great deal of contemporary critical cultural theory. The conundrum, Leys proposes, arises from the conflict between two equally compelling observations. On the one hand, as already suggested, there is the long-standing concern with making sense of the intentionality of the emotions, ‘the fact or idea that emotions are directed at cognitively apprehended objects and are sensitive to “reasons”’ (p. 4). On the other hand, emotions also appear to be common to both humans and non-human animals. Often enough, the latter observation is used to erase any sense of the intentionality of emotions, as if the idea of intention necessitates a highly rational, linguistic, cognitive view of reasonable action. The apparent incommensurability of holding to the intentionality of emotions and also acknowledging the continuities between human and non-human frames the divide between cognitivists – who remain keen to investigate intentionality, but find it difficult to acknowledge emotions in non-human animals – and non-cognitivists – who emphasise ‘the importance of bodily changes and subpersonal processes in the emotions but are seen to have difficulty explaining how it is that emotions have meaning’ (p. 5). It is towards the latter view that theories of affect in the humanities and social sciences more or less knowingly gravitate.

Leys’s genealogical reconstruction of the sciences of emotions shows that the experimental research findings and the rhetorical claims that characterise dominant paradigms of emotions research depend on a stark conceptual separation between feeling and emotion on the one side, and cognition on the other. This is evident in the work of Silvan Tomkins, one of the key scientific sources for arguments in the social sciences and humanities for the idea that affect and cognition are two separate systems. For Tomkins, affects are objectless, because they are bodily responses to stimuli. The implication of this separation, Leys observes (p. 81), is that affects have no necessary relation to the objects that trigger them – and therein lies the elision of any concern with the intentionality of emotions in the dominant paradigm of emotions research that Tomkins helps to found.

The central protagonist of Leys’s book is the psychologist Paul Ekman, who has established the dominant paradigm for research on the emotions in psychology and affective neuroscience. Building on Tomkins’s work, Ekman developed ‘basic emotions theory’, in which the objectless quality of emotions is a foundational assumption. Leys traces how, between them, Tomkins and Ekman have come to stand as the authoritative figures behind a scientific paradigm grounded on the claim that there are a small number of emotions – fear, sadness, surprise, anger, joy – and that these are made manifest in distinct physiological behavioural responses.¹ It is proposed that these basic emotions are linked to ‘affect programs’, so that in this paradigm the brain, emotions, and cognition are understood as separate and distinct systems, arranged in a clear order to causal priority (pp. 223–4).

Pulling no punches, Leys’s argument in *The Ascent of Affect* is that

the experimental evidence for the existence of six or seven (or is it eight or nine or even fifteen?) discrete emotions or 'affect programs' located subcortically in the brain and characterized by distinct, universal facial expressions is seriously flawed, and that the theory underlying the paradigm is incoherent. (pp. 310–11)

Leys shows that the recurring concern in this strand of research to deflate any idea of the intentionality of the emotions, and to present intentional behaviours in non-intentional terms, is a function of a commitment to developing a universally applicable account of emotions. This commitment is, furthermore, inscribed in the positivist conception of experimental design and verification upon which the claims about the universality of emotions made by Tomkins and Ekman depend. The universality of emotions is confirmed by drawing on stimulus/response models of behaviour, in which the participant's actions are thoroughly decontextualised from any wider social or environmental interaction. The basic emotions are, apparently, made manifest in facial expressions that are immediately recognised by others without any need for conscious interpretation. The model of one-to-one correspondence between internal states and external facial expressions is supported by what, viewed from the perspective of mainstream social science at least, would seem to be a remarkably flimsy experimental design involving posed pictures of people pulling what are meant to be scared, or angry, or happy facial expressions.

General claims made about the nonrepresentational, non-cognitive, automatic qualities of action often tend to rely on generalising up and away from very specific types of embodied action – the hand movements involved in playing piano, or throwing a ball, or recalling an image. These are all the sorts of actions that can be measured by scientists of emotions or calibrated by advanced imaging technologies of neuroscientists; they are isolatable and repeatable actions that can be placed within the frame of reductionist experimental designs. The wider intentional situations in which such actions take on meaning – as part of practices – can find no place in orthodox forms of scientific inquiry. By definition, the decontextualisation of emotional behaviour breaks any link between emotion and what emotions are about. This becomes a particular problem when the findings are extrapolated, either in popularisations of neuroscience as ruining ideas of free will, or in more sophisticated form in affect theorists' arguments about the automatism of embodied affects.

The decontextualisation of action upon which the ascendancy of non-cognitive views of emotional life depends, in science as much as in the humanities and social sciences, is evident in the shared aesthetics of visual intensity one finds across both fields. In cultural and political theory alike, for example, the turn to affect is associated with a privileged aesthetic disposition that accords primacy to the integrity of personal responses, and invests strongly in a Deleuzian model of the intensities generated by artworks. Leys's discussion of the methodological and conceptual limitations of Ekman's experiments with photographs of people's faces, which are used to establish the universality of a small number of basic emotions, indicates an underlying affinity between the centrality accorded to images in the experimental fields of psychology and neuroscience, and the investment in an avant-garde model of film amongst affect theorists such as William Connolly (2002). There is a shared ontology of the visual image connecting these two

broad fields, according to which visual representations provide unmediated access to the inner core of individuals, working directly upon the senses to shape people's feelings or serving as a window onto their true emotional states. As already suggested, it is an ontology that depends on the systematic bracketing of contextual matters – issues of *genre*, for example, or, if you prefer, the ways in which the meaning of images relies in part on the understanding that subjects bring to them regarding what *kinds* of image they are (see, for instance, Cavell, 1971). And as a result of being unable to find any space for the active interpretation of situations by actors, it is an ontology that is ill-suited to appreciating what William Kentridge has referred to as 'the agency we have, whether we like it or not, to make sense of the world' (in Tone, 2013: 68).

Disassembling the mind

If the decontextualisation of the meaning of actions and behaviours is an essential feature of the basic emotions paradigm in psychology, then it in turn underwrites the fundamental normative opposition that frames research in this field. Ekman's experimental psychology is framed by a clear and categorical contrast between authentic expression and deception. And it is around this contrast that Leys zeroes in on the philosophical subtext of the basic emotions paradigm. As she observes, the fundamental assumption in Ekman's work is 'the idea that a distinction can be strictly maintained between authentic and artificial expressions of emotion based on differences between the faces we make when we are alone and those we make when we are with others' (p. 22). In Ekman's work, Leys shows, the contrast between authenticity and deception is mapped onto a contrast between the voluntary and the involuntary. A large part of the attraction of Ekman's non-cognitivist, anti-intentionalist account of emotions lies in the proposition that the body reacts involuntarily in ways that can be revealed by scientific observation:

Once one imagines that emotions are non-intentional states that are simply triggered by various stimuli, and once one imagines that, as inherited patterns of response, under the right conditions they will inevitably express themselves on the face – which is what it means for them to be universal – one is likely to conclude that the inner truth about a person will be detectable by properly trained observers, which is to say, one will conclude that there is an important sense in which the body cannot lie. (p. 127)

In short, the founding assumption of this paradigm is that deception can be stripped away, with the help of a bit of facial recognition technology, to reveal people's authentic emotions. It is a paradigm that assumes that science can demarcate a clear and decisive division between behaviours that are true and those that are false.

In reconstructing the conceptual assumptions underwriting the experimental design of the basic emotions paradigm, Leys finds that there is a very grand philosophical theme animating the search for universal emotions that can be accurately measured and predicted. This style of psychological research proposes to have solved the philosophical problem of 'other minds' (p. 247). In this dominant paradigm, it turns out that the challenges of scepticism towards other minds can be happily resolved – the problem of whether it is possible to know and trust what other people are thinking and feeling is

finally open to empirical resolution. As Leys observes, ‘many emotion theorists are committed to the idea that the problem of cheating and dissimulation can be alleviated, if not completely eliminated, because there exist inbuilt mechanisms of reliable or truthful signalling’ (p. 220). The basic emotions paradigm holds to the idea that there exist innately determined emotional expressions ‘that unfailingly signal to us what other people are thinking and feeling because those expressions are hardwired to do so’ (ibid.). It is proposed that the brain is tuned to directly communicate true feelings to others through facial expressions. Leys suggests that this core assumption in Ekman’s theory and method accounts for the support it has sought from recent developments in neuroimaging technology, and she suggests in passing that it also explains the interest in the basic emotions paradigm shown by surveillance and security agencies (p. 126).

The proposition that real emotional states can be revealed by experimental means is a specific normative stance. It is shaped by the assumption ‘that without such an evolved, automatic system of communication to vouchsafe the genuineness and sincerity of emotional signals, trust, cooperation, and indeed genuine altruism are doomed to be undermined by the selfish human tendency to cheat’ (p. 220). By contrast, the idea that deception is not just a poisonous capacity to be limited or controlled, but an elementary and even positive dynamic of social interaction, is a thought running through a number of philosophical streams of thought. It is, for example, what connects the legacy of the ordinary language philosophy pioneered by J. L. Austin to the deconstructive philosophy developed by Jacques Derrida. For both Austin and Derrida, the capacity to *pretend* is central not just to lying and deception, but also to fiction, to imagination, to the capacity for empathy. It is what accounts not so much for what it means to be human as for the possibility of being humane. On the ordinarily tragic view of human action imputed to both these thinkers by Stanley Cavell (see Cavell, 1995), who stands as a central reference point for Leys’s own philosophical accounting of the sciences of emotions, the line between dishonesty and deception, on the one hand, and the positive aspects of imaginative projection, on the other, is always a blurry one (see Barnett, 2019).

Thinking of the relations between action and thought, or perception and conceptualisation, or emotions and reason, in more fluid and porous terms as suggested by philosophies of the ordinary suggests an alternative account of embodied mindedness. Leys contrasts the ‘readout’ view of facial expressions with a more communicative view developed by an alternative tradition of experimental psychology. In her recounting of the history of the psychology of emotions, Leys’s sympathies clearly lie with figures such as Richard Lazarus, who sought to develop a cognitivist account of emotions counter to the claims of Tomkins and Ekman, and with Alan Fridlund, who explicitly criticised the validity of the empirical methodologies and experimental designs used by Ekman in developing his own ‘behavioral ecology view’ of emotions. From the more dynamic, contextual view that characterises this minor tradition of emotions research, there emerges a thicker notion of deception as ‘omnipresent in nature and potentially highly advantageous for the displayer, and not something that covers over the hidden truth of authentic feelings’ (p. 128). For example, in contrast to the automaticity imputed to facial expressions by Ekman’s theory, in which expressions and their meaning are involuntary affairs, Fridlund presented facial displays as intentional-communicative acts, on an understanding that ‘facial movements primarily serve social motives’

(p. 238). Crucially, in developing this more contextual view of emotions, Fridlund not only asserted the interactive dynamics of emotional communication, but also affirmed the continuity of emotional behaviour between humans and non-humans. From this perspective, the intentionality of emotions is not therefore made hostage to a stark opposition between the human and non-human at all. Leys suggests that Fridlund's rejection of the idea that emotions are private internal states has affinities with the undoing of 'the psychologizing of psychology' proposed by Cavell, following Ludwig Wittgenstein, in favour of an ecological-ethological approach (p. 272).

Rejecting the binary modes of conceptualisation and explanation shared by the basic emotions paradigm and theories of affect in the humanities and social sciences requires us to develop ways of explaining the emotions naturalistically while also retaining a sense that meaning is a crucial dimension of any such naturalistic account. To do so, in *The Ascent of Affect* Leys endorses the 'embodied world-taking cognitivism' developed by the philosopher Phil Hutchinson (pp. 13–20). From this perspective, perception is viewed as 'conceptual all the way out', in the sense of that phrase proposed by McDowell (1994). As Leys puts it, 'The resulting account of emotions is a cognitivism that emphasizes the ways in which humans and other animals are alive to aspects of the world – not to the disenchanted world of the modern natural sciences that stands external to minds, but to the cognitivized, conceptualized world' (p. 132). It is a view shared by both the minor traditions of emotions research that Leys champions in this book and a broad philosophical tradition working over the theme of the ordinary to which she also refers – where *ordinary* refers to the conviction that the play of doubt and uncertainty are conditions of action and interaction rather than impediments. And, Leys insists, it is a view with a decidedly different political resonance than that associated with the widespread anti-intentionalism that she traces across the sciences of emotion and cultural theories of affect.

Knowing better

It is certainly appropriate to ask, following Leys's lead (p. 342), what sort of political stance is implied by the implicit eliminativism that pervades theories of the basic emotions, much popular commentary on neuroscience, and cultural theories of affect – where people's intuitive sense of themselves and others as responsible authors of their own actions is seen as so much folk psychology standing in need of correction. In particular, one might ask after the political implications of the flight from any register of intentionality in accounts of human and non-human action. The fundamental issue underwriting Leys's concluding critique of affect theory in the humanities and the social sciences, but also running throughout her accounts of specific scientific disputes, is how to understand the relation between feeling and meaning. In addressing this question, Leys reveals some uncomfortable structural similarities between the universalistic strands of basic emotions theory in psychology and the self-affirming pluralistic tones of cultural theories of affect. What most concerns Leys is the way in which the elision of intentionality from accounts of human action empties the social field of any possibility of argument and debate. Appeals to science-as-ontology in cultural theories of affect, Leys suggests, reduce normative values to merely personal tastes (pp. 344–5). Politically, this means that affect

theory is unable and unwilling to take any normative position at all (p. 348). From Leys's perspective, affect theorists seem to be proposing that people cannot argue or disagree – about the meaning of a text or a political issue – because what they feel is not open to rational justification, however loosely that notion might be understood. And in this respect, there might be a close affinity between the turn to affect and the broader turn *against* critique in certain strands of the literary humanities in particular (see, for example, Felski, 2015).

Leys's construal of the political implications of the turn to affect in the sciences of the emotions sits alongside the arguments of Walter Benn Michaels, Todd Cronan, Jennifer Ashton, and other cultural theorists who have challenged the terms in which affect, feeling, and emotions have been presented as fundamentally undermining any concern with intentionality in the analysis of literature, painting, or photography. Leys is herself closely associated with what one might call 'the nonsite school' of cultural criticism, after the online journal *nonsite.org* of which she, Michaels, Cronan, Ashton, and others are editors and frequent contributors (see: <https://nonsite.org/>). There is a shared worry across this broad school that appeals to the causal power of affect close down any space not just of intentionality, but also and consequently of interpretation. The political significance of those appeals therefore lies in the erasure of any scope for legitimate disagreement or dispute. As Cronan (2014: 17) puts it, 'Without an appeal to intention – trying to understand what someone meant by something (a sign, a mark, a gesture, a sound, a word, an idea) – there are no grounds for disagreement'. The assertion of the sensory immediacy of affects means that questions of interpretation – and therefore the possibility of disagreement – become irrelevant. As Cronan asks rhetorically (*ibid.*: 34), 'What would it be like to disagree about affect?'

When put into the broader perspective of the 'nonsite school', it becomes evident that Leys's critique of the elision of intentionality, in the sciences of emotion as well as in cultural theory, is motivated by an unease with the theoretical effacement of the very possibility of the political as such, understood as a space of reasonable disputation. It is certainly the case that in the canonical political interpretations of the range of work Leys surveys in *The Ascent of Affect*, politics often gets reduced to a game of technocratic engineering and aesthetic disruption (see Barnett, 2013). But the political implications of the turn to affect do not only turn on the presentation of how power relations 'out there' in the world are reproduced or transformed. There is also a politics internal, as it were, to the ascendancy of anti-intentional theories of affect in both the natural sciences and the human sciences, and I think it worth spelling them out more explicitly than Leys does herself.

What the dominant paradigms of analysis in the sciences of emotions share with cultural theories of affect, it turns out, is a claim to inhabit a privileged kind of third-person perspective on other people's actions. Leys herself points out that contemporary naturalistic discourses of brains, emotions, and affects tend to reproduce a thoroughly disenchanting view of the natural world – a view of the natural with no place for norms and meaning. It is a long-standing premise of critical social science that arguments that collapse normativity into simplistic models of scientific naturalism tend to present the self-understanding of acting subjects as mere epiphenomena (see Habermas, 2008). This

tendency might help to explain the lack of clarity that adherents to strong theories of affect in the fields of science and humanities scholarship display in their attitudes towards the everyday, intuitive sense that people tend to have of themselves as having inner selves, able to introspectively reason about their own actions. Is this all an illusion? As Leys observes, ‘The critique of private mental states does not disqualify us from appealing to our sense of having an inner life: metaphors of inside and outside are irresistible; they cannot be legislated away and must therefore represent something significant’ (p. 272). But because of their constitutive aversion to ideas of intentionality, theories of affect, in psychology or neuroscience as much as in cultural theory, do not have anything interesting to say about the significance of these ordinary ways of thinking about mindedness, feeling, and reasoning for how action actually unfolds.

In *The Ascent of Affect*, Leys therefore helps us see that the effacement of the problem of intentionality and meaning in accounts of the embodied qualities of action involves an appropriation of knowing rationality almost entirely to the figure of the omniscient scientist or all-knowing cultural theorist. The dualistic presentation of body and mind that opposes belief and rationality to affect and emotion means that these two sets of attributes get divided between expert knowledge that is only available to the trained specialist, on the one hand, and unknowing subjects responding to affective triggers on the other. This is a shared style of analysis that redistributes the unreflective and reflective aspects of action so that all of the reflection now stands on the side of the scientist or the theorist, rather than being folded together ordinarily in practice, reflection, and learning in the ways taken for granted by social theorists from Karl Marx and Max Weber onwards. In the sciences of emotion that Leys surveys, and in the ontologies of affect that she so effectively skewers for their scientific naivety, reflexivity is entirely evacuated from the field of everyday action inhabited by ordinary people, and is instead a capacity appropriated for themselves by scientific experts or those select analysts attuned to the play of affective resonances in the world. In a sense, then, it is not so much that the world pictured by theorists of basic emotions or nonrepresentational theories of affect is one so saturated in feeling that it is devoid of meaning. It is, rather, that the authority of interpretation has now been reserved for a select few – this is the politics of *knowing* that the ascent of affect projects ahead of itself.

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ORCID iD

Clive Barnett  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1291-1421>

Note

1. Compare this restriction to the expansive account of the emotions provided by Spinoza, a common reference point for theories of affect in the social sciences and humanities. He identified at least 48 emotions, but insisted these were feelings that accompanied the goings-on of acting subjects, as distinct from passively suffered passions (Spinoza, 2000).

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Author biography

Clive Barnett is professor of Geography and Social Theory at the University of Exeter. He is author most recently of *The Priority of Injustice: Locating Democracy in Critical Theory* (University of Georgia Press, 2017).