

JANET MUCH BETTER THAN SARTRE ...
TO STUDY THE LINK BETWEEN EMOTION AND BEHAVIOUR¹

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Abstract. If we had to show the actuality of Pierre Janet, we should simply begin with the phenomenon of emotion, which is perceived today much more as an expression of consciousness than only as a physiological reaction. Where does this interest come from? How is it that emotion today is rather understood as implying also meaning and, therefore, consciousness? It seems this change is the result of a better understanding of emotion as an expressive sign of something other than a purely physiological signal, especially when it comes to anything other than the view of a bear, to use the famous example of William James.

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The genuine psychology which, by fear of metaphysics, had
thrown itself in mathematics, in alleged brain anatomy, in a pseudo-
psychology of vasomotor, came back in the end to its true purpose,
the study of human behaviour.
(Janet 1975, T1, 203)

(...) feelings, in particular, are not built with sensations.
(Janet 1975, T2, 62)

(...) scientific psychology must consider the psychological facts as
actions and express them in terms of action.
(Janet 1975, T2, 71)

We will assume, as a guiding hypothesis, that today's frenzy to studying emotion as *meaning* is more the congruent product of various psychological, artistic and philosophical movements stating there is a strong connection between *the mind* and *the body*, a

connection validated by varied experiences ranging from the psychedelic to the *athlete*, than those advanced by neurobiology.

In fact, it seems that some neuroscientists concerned with psychological (Reuchlin 1995, 240) and sociological approaches have found themselves blocked when have tried to analysis what generates emotion besides its physiological stem. This indicates the great significance of consciousness, who becomes gradually aware of itself and continuously defines itself by its conduct.

All these things were not unknown to Janet, hence his importance for the present day, and that contrary to what Jean-Paul Sartre thought, whose criticism has undoubtedly contributed to the sidelining of the janetienne analysis² in addition to Freudianism, which subject consciousness to the unconscious³, a hierarchy which is now being challenged by cognitive psychology (Reuchlin 1995, 246) and the psychology of motivation (Nuttin 1980, 26), both highlighting the conscious intervention of an active subject.

Let us take the fragment below from Sartre as an example of his misunderstanding of the janetienne analysis:

A theory of emotion which sought to restore the preponderant part played by the psyche would have to treat emotion as a kind of behaviour. Yet for all then, Janet is aware no less than James of the apparent disorder presented by every emotion. He, therefore, threats emotion as a behaviour that is less well adapted, or, if one prefers, a behaviour of disadaptation, a behaviour of defeat. When the task is to difficult and we cannot maintain the better behaviour appropriate to it, the psychic energy that has been released expands itself along another path; we adopt an inferior behaviour which necessitates a lesser psychic tension. Hence, for instance, is a girl whose father has just told her that he has some fear of paralysis. She falls to the ground, prey to a violent emotion which returns a few days later with the same violence, and which finally obliges her to seek help from the doctors. In the course of her treatment, she confesses that the thought of nursing her father and leading the austere life of a nurse has suddenly appeared to her as insupportable. Here, then, the emotion represents an attitude of defeat; it is the substitute for the 'non-maintainable-conduct-of-a-nurse'.

Similarly, in his work *Obsession and Psychasthenia*, Janet cites the cases of several patients who, having come to make confessions to him, could not

finish their confessions, but broke down in tears, sometimes even bringing on a nervous crisis. Here again, the required behaviour is too difficult. The whipping, on the nervous crisis, represents a behaviour of defeat, which substitutes itself for the former by a deviation. (...)

But what are we to understand by it? If we regard the individual objectively as a system of behaviours, and if the deviation takes place automatically, then there is no defeat, it does not exist; all that happens is the replacement of a kind of behaviour by diffusion of organic manifestations. If emotion is to have the psychic significance of a defeat, the consciousness must intervene and confer that signification upon it, there must be conscious retention of the emotion as a defeat precisely in relation to that superior behaviour. But that would be to give consciousness a constitutive function, which Janet will not have at any price. (Sartre: 1962, 35 – 38)

This last statement of Sartre is wrong. Janet gives, on the contrary, a “constitutive” role to consciousness, which can be observed even in the example that Sartre advanced. The nervous crisis is less a “deviation” than a *solution* expressing the refusal to meet the prospective father’s wish to have to take care of him. The fact of rolling on the ground is the *immediate affirmation* and the one which triggered it *the reflected affirmation* - if we use the distinction between these *two types* of conduct made by Janet (Janet 1975, T1, 207)

In other words, the immediate assertion, rolling on the ground, constitutes, from the viewpoint of the subject, a solution, that is to say, a decision of action, a reflected affirmation, which the girl acknowledges it only later.

What else, therefore, consciousness could be if not an act of reflected affirmation, as it is, for instance, the girls’ decision of throwing herself and rolling on the ground to refuse to submit herself to what it is *believed* to be the wish of the other. She *believes* indeed that *if* his father tells her about his paralysis, *then* she must turn into his nurse. Hence the significative “solution” – meaning that it shall be seen as a sign, that it designates, in fact, that something which troubles. There is a twofold temporality here. Not perceiving it would merely mean playing the words instead of seeing

consciousness as constitutive behaviour, as Sartre himself defines it in his text.

Let us now return on this issue more rigorous. Does Janet use precisely the term “consciousness” in his work? Yes, when he defines what the “psychology of action” means:

In this psychology of action, it is necessary to make room for the consciousness, space which can be suppressed when we speak of inferior animals, but which cannot be ignored when we speak of men or even of animals with superior intelligence. But we must speak of the phenomenon of consciousness as a particular type of conduct, as a complication of the act which is superadded to elementary actions. We can reach it by studying the elementary social behaviours and especially the feelings that are, as we shall see, regulations of the action, reactions of the individual to his own actions. (Janet 1975, 175)

Thus, consciousness proves to be a “specific action”, a “complication of the act” that “superimposes itself on particular actions”. This “addition”, Janet says, is perceivable when the “elementary social behaviours” are studied, especially “feelings that are (...) regulations of the action, reactions of the individual to his own actions”. Janet considers the action of consciousness as a regulation of the same nature as that emerging through the formation of feeling.

One question arises at this point: does the very fact of regulating means that consciousness is indeed constitutive to behaviour, as Sartre believed although he did not accept to see it in Janet? For Sartre, it seems that consciousness is a particular capability able to “confer meanings” (as Husserl had demarcated in his *Logical Investigations*, not to mention Hegel, Kant, and, in fact, all philosophy).

If we objectively consider the individual as a system of behaviours, and if the derivation is automatic, failure is nothing, it does not exist, there is simply a replacement of behaviour by a diffuse set of organic manifestations. For emotion to have the psychical meaning of failure, it is necessary that the consciousness intervene and confer meaning to it, it is necessary that it retains

as a possibility the superior conduct and that it perceives emotion precisely as a failure by relating it to this superior type of conduct. But it would give consciousness a constitutive role, which Janet does not want at any price.

For Janet, consciousness is the basis of the regulations of action, namely of feelings. It is even a necessary condition for the psychology of action to exist.

Janet delves deeper into this question by stating that, if feeling turns out to be an “elementary social behaviour”, this requires a thorough study of its foundation, that means analyzing the sense of feeling, of its regulation and thus of the very organization of consciousness. This is what Janet emphasizes in defining the second ground condition for the psychology of action (consciousness being the first; see the quote above):

A second condition is that in this description of behaviours, one must be concerned with superior behaviours, beliefs, reflections, reasoning, experiences. These facts have usually been expressed in terms of thoughts; in order to preserve the same language in psychological science, they must be expressed in terms of actions. (...). In psychology, we must abandon the anatomical and physiological pretensions and humbly limit ourselves to be a psychologist always speaking the language of conduct and action. This is possible even when it comes to the highest behaviours taking into account an essential behaviour, characteristic of man, that of language. (Janet 1975, 175)

We cannot be clearer as to what is Janet induces as a part of consciousness (even though he does not mention it every five minutes) when it comes to higher behaviours, especially that of language. On this topic, Janet adds immediately after:

Language is a particular action of man, which is, in the beginning, a real external action, that is to say, an act of a subject that determines reactions to others. But language can very easily become an internal action, that is to say, an act of a subject that only determines reactions in himself. I tried to consider the very different behaviours between external behaviours and thoughts, those in which language intervenes as an intermediary; they allowed me to objectively approach the highest psychological phenomena, those that are most intimate of man, and express them in terms of actions. This psychology,

we can call it psychology of behaviour to indicate that it is about an extended and higher form of behavioural psychology. This is how we should study the psychological issues of the sick.

To better understand how Janet brings consciousness into the formation of emotions, let us consider another case, of a woman who, Janet says:

(...) believes, in her delirium, that she is transformed into a lion, that she is a lioness. She walks on all fours, roars, scratches a drawer with her claws, takes out photographs, chooses photographs of children and devours them. Can we imagine a more beautiful symbolism and absurdity? But when it comes to dinner, she refuses papers and eats her soup with a spoon.

A woman in a crisis of doubt wrote me the following letter: 'I am again very unhappy, unable to write or read a word. I have before me a letter from my daughter and I cannot read it because I absolutely do not understand how black dots on paper may bear someone's thoughts. Could you write me a note to tell me when could I come to see you?' But finally! If she cannot understand a written word, why is she writing to me and why is she asking me for a written answer? In all these innumerable cases, the disorder exists only in the acts of reflected belief, in the reflected establishment of a relation between the speech and the action made by the members. When the question of belief does not arise, when it comes to the act done only with the members, there is no trouble. (Janet 1975, 205)

Janet thus establishes a link between a word and an action through the reflection constituted as a belief and which will materialize itself in action, that to refuse to read. It is necessary the intervention of another process, of reason, to succeed in getting out of it. Janet also reports the following case:

Delboeuf used to describe this amusing experience: he had suggested to a sleepwalker that her head had been cut off and that henceforth she had to live without the head. The poor girl was walking around the room, feeling her neck, never raising her fingers above the imaginary cut. She was looking at herself in the mirror, saying, 'It's very ugly and sad to no more have a head'. An assistant awkwardly remarked that to see in the mirror and speak one has to have eyes, a mouth and, consequently, the head. This remark made the somnambulist very uneasy and awakened her, but she had not previously felt the complete opposite of the two parts of the belief. (...)

In order for the affirmation and belief be stopped when the terms imply opposing and irreconcilable actions, a new act must be added to the simple assertive belief. It is necessary that the thought of a rule come to oppose the affirmation. This act is performed correctly only at this rational stage when the mind has become capable of giving force to logical or moral formulas and of transforming them into orders. We do not have to study these higher stages but already at the considered stage of the logical and moral rules, it can have some importance. (Janet 1975, 209)

Let us remember that the rational stage is that moment when “the spirit has become capable of giving strength to logical or legal formulas and of turning them into powerful orders”. Janet notes, however, that the premises exist as to the belief staffing to logical or legal formulas, which he calls the reflected belief.

Janet thus establishes a scale of meaning (Janet 1975, 223) that, contrary to what Sartre believed, complicates the organization of consciousness⁴. The idea that we are always rational seemed incongruous to him:

(...) The principles of reason necessarily apply, it was said because it is impossible to have two contradictory behaviours simultaneously. The physical laws of the movements and the psychological laws of the beliefs were completely confounded. (Janet 1975, 208)

Hence the act of observing the non-application of the principles of reason over each one's consciousness (what Janet called the *assertive stage*, where assertive combines the real and the imaginary and his trouble: the belief pithiatic (Janet 1975, 210)). Janet also writes:

The reflected belief is formed through discussion with the other members of society, a discussion which ends up becoming internal in an isolated individual but always retains its primitive character of social discussion. The other *socii*, to designate them with the expression used by Mr Baldwin, opposed to the temptation of affirming their own beliefs. These are not always individual, they are often common to many and constitute the beliefs of society. He, who tries to support and defend a different belief, learns to his cost that it is dangerous to contradict common beliefs.

This rule of social concordance, which imposes a certain harmony in the beliefs of a social group, will become, at the rational stage, the starting point of the principle of non-contradiction: it will become forbidden to contradict oneself as to contradict the others without reason. But already at the reflected stage this rule intervenes at least from time to time and determines a certain coherence of beliefs. (Janet 1975, 209 - 210)

We shall observe that apprehending the significance as a *comprehensive scale of the endowment of meaning* is close to the broad definition that Max Weber gives to the term “reason” in his *Sociology*⁵.

For Weber, it is indeed to widen the horizon (to include the irrational as a “significant set” (Weber 1995, 35)) by considering that although behaviours can be contradictory, they must be perceived from the moment when they make sense for the actor; on the other hand, that on a completely different scale, that of reason as universal thought, such behaviours cannot last either because they prevent the advancement of a development or because they compete with other behaviours that are much more adequate in the organization of the action.

For instance, as Janet observed above, the *distinction* (and not the irreconcilable separation) within reason itself, taken in the broad sense of significate between the logic of the excluded third (which, historically speaking, produced the scientific and technical methodology) and the logic of *belief*, can very well accommodate, at least to a certain extent, with the contradictory rules of behaviour and, thus, of a dissociated organization of acts of consciousness and their translation, in terms of actions, whether it is an emotion or a drive.

We then see that the challenge for consciousness and behaviour resides in *scheduling the stages of apprehension of belief as a synthesis*. When this weakens is not possible, dissonances going up to dissociation disorder, when the last is not resolved, are observed.

In *The Psychological Automatism*, Janet had well seen this perspective in all its asperity (*Conclusion*, Chapter III, Second Part 488).

The mental disintegration, the formation of successive and simultaneous personalities in the same individual, the automatic functioning of these various psychological groups isolated from each other are not artificial things, bizarre results of experimental manoeuvres. These are perfectly real and natural things that experience allows us to discover and study, although it does not create them. (Janet 1998, 488)

In the *Conclusion* of the Chap. IV (*Second Part*), Janet adds:

How could a psychologist like Moreau (from Tours) write this astonishing sentence: 'In becoming an idiot, a subject goes through a psychocerebral state which, while continuing to develop, should make him a man of genius (in *Psychologie morbide*, 71). How could he believe that the diseases of the nervous system and even madness could favour the development of intelligence? It is probably because of the word 'excitement' that he constantly uses to designate madness. No, whatever the analogies in external circumstances could be, madness and genius are two extreme and opposite terms in all psychological developments. The whole history of madness, as Baillarger said and, after him, many other alienists, is only the description of the psychological automatism left to itself, and this automatism, in all its manifestations, depends on the current weakness of synthesis which is moral weakness itself, the psychological misery.

Genius, on the contrary, is a power of synthesis capable of forming entirely new ideas, which no previous science could have foreseen; it is the last degree of moral power. Ordinary men oscillate between these two extremes, more determined and automatic if their moral force is weaker, worthier of being considered as free and moral beings when the small moral force that they have in them and whose nature we do not know is growing further. (Janet 1998, 525 – 526)

What should be concluded from all these? Firstly, the fact that it is necessary to distinguish the necessity of the synthesis and the fact that we act in a non-identical manner according to our character (or *conation* for Reuchlin) and the historical conditions in which we live.

If the synthesis is essential, syntheses are possible and we should define how can they evaluate themselves from their singularity, especially today, in the media age, where the multiplication of realities and references attracts and produces compensations that further complicate the problem.

The role of an *objective* evaluation of the action in the light of Pierre Janet's psychology of behaviour becomes, once again, an indispensable reference framework recognized more and more at the international level.

NOTES

1. A French version of this paper was first published in *Dogma. Revue de Philosophie et du Sciences Humaines*, Édition Automne-Hiver 2016, pp. 1 – 11. <http://www.dogma.lu/edition-hiver-2016/>
2. For example, in Jean-Paul Sartre. *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*. Paris: Hermann, 1960, 23-25.
3. This subordination actually imitated that operated by Marxism, which made of consciousness a reflection of economic and political interests: the Freudian Marxism was born and continued to flourish with Bourdieu. See my book *Ethics and Epistemology of Nihilism, the Murderers of the meaning*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.
4. See my book *Pierre Janet Is Not Dead*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007.
5. When Weber is studying, for instance, the “motivations” (Weber 1995, 34 – “Categories of Sociology”, *First Chapter*, “The Basic Concepts of Sociology”) it is about “understanding” (*Ibid.*, 34), the “meaning” (*Ibid.* 28) as a “significant set” (*Ibid.*, 38). That is to say, as a “pattern” or “reason”: ‘We call ‘cause’ a significant set which appears to be, in the eyes of the agent or the observer, the significant reason of comportment (*Ibid.*, 37).

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