



Tadeusz Czeżowski

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Fear and anxiety (a study in the classification of feelings)

The feelings we label as fear, terror, anxiety, and apprehension occur in two markedly different forms. The first is primal, more passive and causally determined, while the second is complex and more active – purpose-oriented.¹ Language distinguishes between them in such a way that verbs used to name the first form are used in the passive voice with a genitive complement (I am frightened by something), while the verbs ‘I am afraid’ and ‘I fear’, which express the second form of these feelings, are used in the reflexive form with an accusative complement or with a purpose clause (‘I am afraid of something’). ‘I am afraid’, which expresses the second form of these feelings, uses a pronominal form with an object in the accusative or with a purpose clause (‘I am afraid of something’, ‘I am afraid that...’).

The original form of the feeling we are interested in, which we will refer to in short as fear, arises under the influence of sudden and strong physical stimuli, which, in addition to visual, auditory, and tactile sensations, which are their proper stimuli, also cause certain systemic sensations related to disturbances in heart and respiratory function, weakness and trembling of the limbs, etc., as additional effects of these stimuli. Such stimuli include, for instance, a flash or crack of thunder, or a nearby blast of explosives, a sudden scream in one’s ear, a violent

¹ Translator’s note: the following grammatical explanation is true of the original Polish language here translated, but not of the English translation

blow or a movement-restricting grab, a fall, etc. Fear, like any feeling, is a complex experience that includes an intellectual (cognitive) element and an emotional element. The intellectual component is a set of sensory impressions, divisible into two groups: one consists of visual, auditory, tactile, and other impressions caused directly by the stimulus, the other consists of the bodily reactions mentioned above. The two together will be referred to as the psychological basis of fear. The emotional component is the unpleasantness that accompanies the psychological basis, coloured in a specific way by bodily sensations. In the psychological basis, the second group of sensations depends on the first (which is why some people, wanting to protect themselves from the fear of thunder, hide their heads under a pillow during a storm), and at the same time creates a necessary condition for the emergence of a feeling; where these bodily sensations are absent, there is no feeling: those who have, as they say, strong nerves, i.e. those who do not experience the said functional disturbances of internal organs, are not frightened by loud noises or other stimuli; whenever these bodily sensations occur, a feeling of fear arises even without external stimuli, as is the case with certain heart diseases or neuroses, and as happens with children and particularly sensitive people when they find themselves in the dark.

Feelings consisting of sensory impressions and the pleasure or discomfort arising from them are called sensory feelings and are classified as experiential feelings. These include, for example, the feeling of pain, which is based on the sensation of pain, the feeling of hunger or satiety, sexual feelings, disgust, anger, and others. Fear is also a sensory feeling, arising and passing along with a group of sensory impressions that constitute its essential component. A sensory feeling is not objectively directed, but has as its object an intentional experience that constitutes its psychological basis: for example, a pinch is a stimulus for the sensation of pain, and the feeling of pain, composed of that sensation and the accompanying discomfort, has as its object not the pinch itself, but the sensation of pain that is part of the feeling: it is the sensation that is unpleasant, not the pinch, because when there is no sensation of pain with the pinch, e.g. under anaesthesia, there is also no discomfort. Anyone who succumbs to fear in the dark is usually unable to answer the question of what they are afraid of; darkness is frightening in the sense that it causes fear, but it is the experience itself, not darkness, that is the object of fear, sometimes those who succumb to fear in the dark subsequently add objects to it in their imagination, such as ghosts, creatures, and spirits. A mentally ill person experiencing fear as a result of their illness similarly invents illusory suffering as the object of their fears. Also,

when fear is caused by the sound of an explosion or thunder, this stimulus is a contributing factor to the fear, but not its object, because it causes the feeling and then immediately passes and no longer exists when the fear continues. Nor is the expected next lightning strike during a storm the object of this feeling, because those who fear future events experience a different feeling – anxiety, which we will discuss further on.

Fear, like all sensory feelings, possesses a characteristic liveliness, insistence, or painfulness that is present in its actual experience, but disappears in memory. Just as pain experienced is acute, but when recalled no longer has this characteristic, so fear when recalled is completely different from the fear experienced; this difference does not exist, for example, in aesthetic feelings. Finally, fear is an instinctive reaction to an external stimulus, common to a wide range of humans and animals, leading to characteristic instinctive behaviour, i.e. a protective freeze or flight.

The second type of feeling we are interested in is different, and we use the term fear or anxiety to describe it. Fear has an external object, i.e. one that lies outside its psychological basis, and is therefore not a sensory feeling. It consists of new factors. One of them is representation, which makes the object of fear present. The second important component of the experience of fear is the belief that the object exists or may exist; hence, fear belongs to the category of beliefs. Moreover, the feeling of fear includes an evaluation that attributes evil, i.e. a negative value, to the object: fear is a feeling of value. Finally, it is a heteropathic feeling, as it is directed, not only towards the object, which is, say, the threat of death or suffering, loss or harm, but also towards the person who may be the perpetrator or harbinger of danger. Common to both fear and anxiety are their emotional quality and the aforementioned vividness or distress. Both moments have their source in a set of bodily sensations, which, in the case of fear, arise under the influence of a stimulus, and in the case of anxiety, are accompanied by a conviction that the object of the feeling exists, and by a negative assessment of that object. Another common feature of fear and anxiety is their guiding role in the behaviour of the subject of the feeling. Fear-driven behaviour is an immediate, instinctive reaction to a stimulus. Anxiety, on the other hand, which is a fully intellectualized, forward-looking, and anticipatory form of emotion, leads to conscious and deliberate behaviour, often calculated for the long term.

To summarise the above analysis, we can describe the structure of anxiety as follows: its psychological basis consists of two groups of experiences, as is the case with fear. The first group includes the presentation of the object of the feeling together with the conviction of the existence of that object (this may be, but does not have to be, a direct perception of

the object) and, as a specific element, a negative assessment of the object. This group (analogous to the group of visual impressions, etc., caused directly by an external stimulus in the case of experiential fear) is, when there exists an appropriate dispositional basis, a sufficient condition for the emergence of a group of bodily sensations, the second component of the psychological basis common to fear and anxiety, to which the unpleasant feelings that arise directly with them impart a characteristic colouring.

It is reasonable to assume that fear and anxiety are genetically linked, with fear being the primary emotion and anxiety its developed form. A form of fear that arises under the influence of a conditioned stimulus appears to be an intermediate form. In Watson's famous experiment, a child was shown a rabbit and then frightened by a sudden noise. After repeating this a few times, the child, who had previously enjoyed seeing the rabbit, began to show the same amount of fear at the sight of the rabbit as at the noise. The feeling has not yet transformed into an objective feeling in this case, so there is no basis to conclude that the child expected noise when it saw the rabbit: the sight of the rabbit, through simple association, not through the intellectual components that form the psychological basis of fear, triggered the other elements of the feeling, i.e. characteristic bodily sensations and distress.

For a feeling of fear to develop, it takes more than a simple association between the presentation of a conditioned stimulus and the response it triggers. Additional cognitive acts, beliefs, and evaluations must come between the presentation and the emotional response. It is not possible to trace the entire developmental process here: let us focus on just two moments. One is the generalization from the individual experience of a stimulus triggering an emotional response to a general representation of an object posing a threat. People who fear war, fire, or natural disasters are aware of the patterns that pose a threat, and this is one of the reasons for recognizing a given object (perceptual or otherwise) as something bad. The second moment is a generalization that goes in a different direction and is analogous to the phenomenon of sublimation of feelings, which is well known in the domain of emotions. Fear is directly related to stimuli of biological significance, threatening death or physical suffering, while anxiety arises not only in the face of danger threatening the body, but also as a fear of moral evil in the broad sense of the word. A child experiences fear under the influence of stimuli such as a raised voice, clapping hands, or an angry expression on their mother's face, but is then afraid of reprimands or bad grades at school. Humiliation, restriction of freedom, damage, and loss of all kinds of goods, and

everything that threatens them, becomes the object of fear, and thus its scope extends to the entire range of absolute and relative negative values. Whatever is judged negatively may arouse fear; fear, transforming into anxiety, develops at the same time into a feeling of value in the full sense of the word. It also becomes a heteropathic feeling, because the relationships between objects and phenomena, against the background of which fear transforms into anxiety, include the sphere of interpersonal relations. As a result, fear, which is directed at something bad that threatens or may threaten, is at the same time directed at the people on whom the infliction of harm may depend. These individuals are not the object of fear, even though we say 'I am afraid of John or Joseph' in the same way that we say 'I am afraid of disability'; for I am not afraid of John directly, but because of the harm he may cause or inflict, and the actual object of my fear is that harm itself. A heteropathic feeling connects the subject of the feeling, its object, and the person on whom the object depends in some way through a tripartite relationship.

What was said above about the contrast between fear and anxiety as two forms of emotion closely related in terms of similarity and origin can be applied to many other emotions that occur either as experiential emotions or as objective feelings of value. Sensual love and ideal love, not only in the sphere of interpersonal relations, but also encompassing all kinds of goods; the primitive joy of a sated savage and the joy of a full and rich inner life; childish sadness and the sadness of philosophical pessimism; blind rage in the struggle for the life of primitive man, and anger conscious of its object, driving just retribution; the disgust some people feel at touching a mouse or a beetle and the repulsion an honest person feels when forced to associate with criminals – these are examples of such pairs of opposing feelings. In each of the examples given, both parts of the pairing are bound by a common emotional quality that brings them together under a common name. This leads to the assumption that in the examples given, as in the case of fear and anxiety, the feeling of value arises as a secondary, developed form of the original experiential feeling. An additional argument for the similarity between experiential feelings and feelings of value is provided by the characteristic vividness, intensity, and affectivity of feelings of value, which bring them closer to experiential feelings, but are foreign to aesthetic feelings, and the guiding role that experiential feelings and feelings of value play in human behaviour – again joining them in their common opposition to aesthetic feelings.

The explanation for the aforementioned similarities between sensory feelings and feelings of value can be found in the statement that both

contain, in their psychological basis, a set of analogous bodily sensations, to which, in some cases, are directly added feelings of pleasure, and in others, feelings of discomfort. We are fully aware of the existence of these bodily sensations once we pay attention to them. We feel joy, sadness, admiration, love, hatred, and anger in our whole body, especially in our chest, where the lungs and heart are located: hence a number of expressions such as 'my heart is heavy' or 'light', and the old belief that the heart is the home of feelings. This state of affairs is highlighted by the James-Lange theories of feelings, which operate exclusively on observations in the field of sensory feelings and value feelings. These systemic impressions give feelings a specific colouring; they distinguish the unpleasantness of fear from the unpleasantness of anger or jealousy, the pleasure of joy from the pleasure of complete submission to admiration or respect. They make feelings of value as vivid and painful as feelings of sensation, and finally, they add to the feeling a drive that guides behaviour instinctively in the case of experiential feelings, and purposefully in the case of feelings of value.

Feelings of value differ from sensory feelings in that they are intellectualized and sublimated. The intellectualization of a feeling involves the development of its psychological basis; while the psychological basis of a sensory feeling consists of a set of sensory impressions without any distinct form; the psychological basis of a feeling of value includes the representation of the object of the feeling and the belief in the existence of that object. The intellectualization of a feeling of value makes it an objective feeling and, furthermore, provides a starting point for evaluating the object in terms of its value as good or bad. Judgement is a specific, indivisible element of mental life, similar in many respects to a belief. Just as a belief is an experience characteristic of a cognitive attitude, so a judgement is an experience characteristic of a practical or aesthetic attitude towards the external world. When viewed against the background of specific dispositions and with the appropriate mental attitude, the presentation of an object becomes a motive for the emergence of either a belief confirming its existence or a judgement confirming its value.

Attention is a cognitive mental attitude; in a state of attentiveness, perceptual images become a sufficient motive for the formation of perceptual beliefs, as do reproductive images for retrospective beliefs. A practical or an aesthetic mental attitude – there is no name for them in everyday language – makes the presentation of an object a sufficient motive for the assessment of its value. The belief in the existence of the presented object and the judgement of its value are independent of each other in the sense that each of them can occur regardless of the other: we

ascertain the existence of an object without taking its value into account, but we can also judge objects regardless of whether we have ascertained their existence.

Judgement, like belief, is of a dual nature: affirmative and negative. However, while belief affirms or negates the existence of an object, judgement affirms or negates its value. Like belief, judgement is either correct or erroneous. We determine the veracity of a judgement in the same way as we determine the veracity of a statement: a judgement is true only if it assesses a valuable object as valuable, or as worthless if it is not valuable; it is false in the opposite case. Value is not a feature of an object, it cannot be perceived by the senses, nor can it be represented in a representation, but it is determined in an evaluation – just as existence cannot be depicted in a representation, because it is not a feature of an object, but is established in a belief. Judgements are close to empirical beliefs in that they are, like the latter, individual and directly justified. The veracity of a judgement cannot be proved; it can only be verified – like an empirical belief – by repeating judgements under different conditions and comparing them with one another. Individual judgements are the starting point for generalizations analogous to scientific laws as generalizations of individual empirical beliefs. Generalized judgements state that things with certain characteristics are valuable; we call these characteristics criteria of value. The representation of an object, together with the belief regarding its existence and assessment of its value, takes the place of the stimulus that evokes the primary sensory feeling and arouses the other components of the feeling, i.e. bodily sensations accompanied by the emotional quality of pleasure or displeasure, whereby the statement of the existence of an object that we evaluate positively gives pleasure, while the statement of the existence of an object that we evaluate negatively gives displeasure. The roles of belief and evaluation are equivalent in that each is a necessary component of the feeling of value. The emotional quality will not appear either when there is no confirmation that the object of evaluation exists or when there is no evaluation of the object, even though we have confirmed its existence. The primary sensory feeling is exclusively biological in nature, as pleasure and displeasure are usually associated with the biological value of a stimulus. When the sensory feeling transforms into a feeling of value, judgement appears and the biological orientation ceases to be exclusive. 'Good' means something different from 'biologically useful', and the range of objects evaluated as good is not identical to the range of what is biologically useful, but as the subject matures, it expands to include more and more diverse objects. This shift within the range of valuable objects and the expansion of that range is called the

sublimation of the feeling of value: it is directly related to the introduction of judgement into the psychological basis of feeling.

The starting point for the above analysis was the classification of feelings taken from the Brentano school. This classification was based on two principles, and divided feelings first into those that are directed towards experience in their psychological basis, i.e. experiential, and secondly, those that are directed towards the object given in the representation underlying the feeling, i.e. objective. Objective feelings, in turn, are divided into aesthetic, or representational, in which the mere representation of the object, without asserting that it exists, is sufficient (while certain conditions are still met) for the feeling to arise, and into value or representational feelings, in which the psychological basis includes the assertion of the existence of the object of the feeling. The classification scheme is therefore as follows:

Feelings	
experiential	objective
aesthetic	value

In this scheme, experiential feelings and value feelings are separated from each other. Despite this, an analysis of fear and anxiety, the results of which can be extended to other pairs of experiential feelings and value feelings, shows, in my opinion, that they are genetically related and, moreover, similar to each other, especially in their active nature, which aesthetic feelings do not possess. This suggests another principle for the basic division of feelings, namely, their division into active and inactive or contemplative. This division is particularly clear among objective feelings, where value feelings are active and aesthetic feelings are contemplative. However, it can probably also be applied to experiential feelings: the feeling of a cat basking in the sun, the pleasure of a warm bath, or the pleasure of resting after a long walk would be such inactive experiential feelings. This results in a four-part division, which has the advantage of linking genetically related experiential feelings and value feelings in the group of active feelings, and it is possible that a similar genetic link could also be found among inactive feelings. Here is how it works:

Feelings			
active		inactive (contemplative)	
experiential	value	experiential	aesthetic

Fear and anxiety are, as has been said, motives for behaviour; they are powerful regulators of human conduct. But their role is not so overwhelming that they cannot be controlled by other, opposing motives. The path to controlling them leads through the development of an aesthetic character as the basis of fortitude. Ethical character, in turn, comprises two types of dispositions that are developed through upbringing and moral self-education: these include moral principles that indicate duties and a strong will as a disposition that inhibits motives contrary to moral principles. However, an analysis of the relationship between fortitude and fear and anxiety extends beyond the scope of these considerations.

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