

Feeling as a Metaphor

It's interesting that we use the term "feelings" to describe emotional states of mind, conscious perceptions of emotional states. Why do we call them "feelings"...? It seems to me there's some sort of metaphor, or schema being played out there. We usually attribute feelings, the word "feeling" tactile representing, "feeling" means to touch something with the hand, doesn't it,

to run one's hand over the surface of something,

to gauge the size of something by holding it in one's hand, and the weight of something. It seems to me that that metaphor is being played out in our use of the term "feeling" to indicate our understanding of an emotional state.

Things that we feel, in the real world, real feelings, the things that the metaphor is drawn from, they lie within our grasp – that's obvious – they're within a very close proximity to where we are. They are certainly within eighteen inches of our skin, you know, of the main part of our body, our head. This is the stuff we should pay close attention too... it's not, at that range it's not distanced from it, it's not out there in the objective world,

we can't be blasé about it,

but at the same time it's not inside of it, it's not part of us. It's in this nebulous zone between being part of our being and being out there, part of our knowing. Feelings seem to occupy this weird middle ground (real feelings, feelings of objects). And we don't – other people might know what a feeling is but they can't feel what we feel. And when we put our hand on something and we do feel the object, clearly other people cannot have that feeling, they can't put their hand where our hand is. They can't stand, literally, in the place where we're standing and feel the earth under our feet, the way we're feeling the earth under our feet. So that particular proximity is a very specific one.

So what does that mean when it's applied to emotional states, in the form of a metaphor? We have these emotional states inside ourselves, a set of bodily responses and we want to try to access them, and try to have them as knowledge. If we're saying that they're feelings, well they're not insights, we're not seeing them as somehow distanced objects on the horizon; that's clearly not what's happening. I think that's probably accurate: our feelings aren't – we can't be objective about our feelings. They're a bit – they're closer to us, in an odd way. At the same time, they're not – our feelings aren't us, they're not so close to us – even when they're actually inside our body – they're not so close to who we are that they become part of our being. Although we sometimes do say "I am angry", quite often we say "I feel angry"; there's the "angry" and it's somehow inside of us, and we're running metaphorical hands over it, and feeling its heat and its shape and its size and its weight.