

PATTERN OF EMOTION AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH*

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Abstract

This paper constructs a pattern of emotion by thinking of emotions in terms of activity, and explores the notion of emotional maturity in light of such a pattern.

Being guided by Dewey's philosophical work, the first part of the paper presents the pattern of emotional activity. Among other things this pattern aims at devising a vocabulary to capture the dynamic nature of emotional life in order to focus our attention in the lively activities of mind instead of its results.

The second part explores how thinking of emotions in terms of activity may provide a fruitful way to understand the process of emotional maturity. Building upon the pattern of emotional activity, the paper argues that the reasons why stories help us to grow emotionally lies in the fact that they embody a deliberate search of paradigm scenarios (De Sousa 1987). This part ends by showing that thinking in terms of a pattern of emotion helps us to understand more clearly why language is a crucial element in emotional development.

I conclude by pointing out some of the things that have been left open and unanswered about the pattern of emotional activity.

Keywords

Emotion, education, growth, paradigm scenario

I. PATTERN OF INQUIRY AND PATTERN OF EMOTION

1. Constructing the Pattern of Emotion

When one puts together the comments Dewey made about emotions one realizes that the way he describes them is very similar to the way he describes ideas, that is, emotions seem to behave similarly to ideas (Mendonça, 2003). According to Dewey, first emotions are connected to situations, like ideas are connected to problematic situations. Second, both emotions and ideas change

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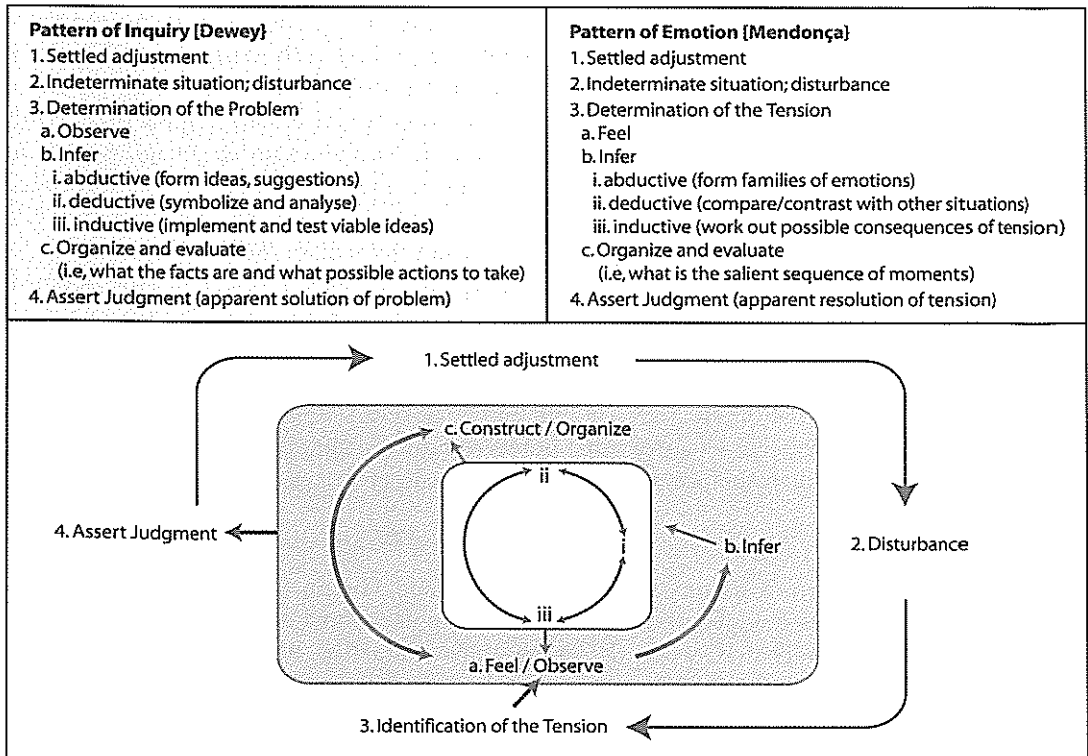
and develop according to the change and development of the situation they belong too. Third, though they both come to us involuntarily (for Dewey suggestions that appear in the face of problematic situations are involuntary, just as emotions assault us), they nevertheless have the power to direct and guide the further development of the situation at hand. The ability to use emotions and ideas to guide future situational developments is not a given and complete characteristic—it is formed and created with experiences. This means that their guiding power is simultaneously an exploratory ability. The success of this exploratory ability is testified by the way we refer to both ideas and emotions with simple and compact words: infinity, gravity, joy, sorrow, etc. However, this simplicity is the result of previous undergone experience.

Since Dewey designed a pattern of inquiry where one could see the dynamic nature of ideas, it may be possible to build an equivalent insightful pattern for emotions.

The two patterns here presented should not be taken as something of a cognitive-emotional split, which divides the world into emotional experience and experience of inquiry. The identification of a certain type of pattern of an experience happens after its occurrence and should be understood as a mode of clarifying the salient parts of that specific experience. Consequently, the experience of solving a specific problem can be analysed, depending upon what is of interest, in terms of the pattern of inquiry as well as analysed in terms of the pattern of emotion.

In addition, it must be pointed out that the pattern of emotion does not aim to describe all emotional activity, just like the pattern of inquiry does not describe all problem-solving activity. The pattern of inquiry describes the format of deliberate inquiry; nevertheless, it serves to read what happens in problem solving activity, for deliberate inquiry is a refinement of such activity. The pattern of emotion describes the format of an integrated emotional experience; nevertheless, it serves to understand the impact of emotions even when we do not take them in its integration process.

Here is the general structure of the pattern:



1.1. Settled adjustment

The first moment of the pattern aims to point to how things stand before the situation occurs, but this moment is somewhat false. That is, when one thinks of a situation one separates and distinguishes it from the flow of occurrences and, consequently, one assume some type of settled flow of events where nothing is disturbed. However, this is somewhat false, as every moment of life is full of uncertainties, tensions etc, such that we can say that there are always several situations at stake. Yet, when we think of a situation, for example the death of a close friend, this appears separated from the rest of experience. It is in this sense that we conceive a settled adjustment.

1.2 Indeterminate situation

In the pattern of inquiry the situation is indeterminate with respect to its issue (LW 12:110), consequently the situation is not doubtful in a subjective sense (LW 12:110). In the pattern of emotion the disturbance is described in a similar manner: the situation is disturbed, confused, obscure (LW 12:109).

1.3 The determination of the problem and Identification of the Tension

In the pattern of inquiry this step begins with the institution of a problem, that is the indeterminacy is formatted in terms of a problematic situation (LW 12:111). In the pattern of emotion it begins by the recognition of a tension, that is, the indeterminacy is formatted in terms of a situation of tension. It is never too much to insist that these two patterns should not be taken as descriptions of different realities but, instead, of different emphases of analysis. Clearly a problematic situation is a type of tense situation and consequently the resolution of problematic situations may be examined in light of the pattern of emotion, as well as integrated tense situations may be examined through the pattern of inquiry.

The determination of a problem as well as the identification of a tension is not a quick process and, as the picture of the patterns illustrates, it involves a process with many stages. The items “a-e” should not be seen as a rigid sequence. Instead, they should be taken as a dynamic occurrence where one may return to the first step given (a: feel/observe) after having gone through the process of inference (i-ii-iii). Let me illustrate this sequence with an example. Imagine someone sitting in their living room reading a book. Then the phone rings, it is this person’s mother telling her that her cousin died in a motorbike accident. From the moment she hears the words to feeling the tension there is a space, that is, the tension is not immediate. But once tension settles, she feels distress, she is taken by the news. By letting herself feel taken by the news she begins to form a family of emotions: sadness, bewilderment, anger, pity, curiosity, etc. She compares and contrasts the news of his death with other situations of loss, and with memories of him (situations of no loss). She works out possible consequences of tension (future family events, future possible losses, what will she do next time she sees her aunt and uncle, etc.). By doing this she constructs a narrative; his death slowly becomes a story that points to future action: calling her aunt and uncle, remembering him more than she has done over the past year, etc.

1.4 Assert judgment

For Dewey the pattern of inquiry reached an end when “The final judgment arrived at is a settlement. ... The sentence or proposition is not an end in itself but a decisive directive of future activities.” (LW 12:124) That is, when the indeterminate situation becomes settled because a solution has been found for the problem at stake.

In the pattern of enjoyment, the indeterminate situation finds an end when the initial tension becomes integrated. This requires some explanation. The best way to begin explaining this

integration is by pointing to my previous illustration: Though her cousin died yesterday it may take her months or even years to feel that grief is integrated. One acknowledges this sense of integration of grief by realizing that it takes some time for people to be able to talk about someone they have lost.

This means that the transformation that is taken into consideration when we examine experience in terms of patterns of inquiry differs from the transformation captured by the pattern of emotion in a crucial sense. Namely, in the pattern of emotion the self is highly implicated because the final integration means integration in an identity (either a person, country, school, etc); while in the pattern of inquiry it is not relevant for the analysis of inquiry how the inquirer has integrated the conclusion reached.

2. Advantages of the Pattern of Emotion

The pattern of emotion was made upon the startling conclusion that under Dewey's description emotions behave like ideas. But why would thinking through situations be helpful for a theory of emotions?

First, it is one way to grasp the intentionality of emotions and avoid attaching them solely to the sentient subject. Ronald de Sousa in his book *The Rationality of Emotions*, makes a similar move to examine emotional life. Indeed, his notion of paradigm scenarios fits remarkably well with the constructed pattern of emotion.

Second, the pattern allows for the emotional character of a situation to change with reflection upon it. For the construction of a narrative may transform the initial family of emotions of a certain situation such that a situation that is initially labelled as anger can be later labelled as sad. For example, I may feel angry about a harsh reply from a friend but it is possible that I end up labelling the situation as sad by attaching it to a lack of communication between us months after the event occurred.

Third, we can start to clarify some of the ambiguities attached to emotion words. So, for instance, sadness may make part of the family of emotions of a certain pattern (grief situation) even though the final emotion recognized is not sadness. But sadness may also be the final judgment of the situation. Among other things, this allows us to explain why some see that emotion as an occurrence similar to perception (part of the family of the situation) while others view sadness as an evaluation (labelling the situation). It also shows that when experimental psychologists are studying emotions by means of showing subjects pictures and recording their physical/mental activity, they may be measuring solely how sadness appears in a family of emotions of a situation and fail to account for sadness as an integrated emotion.

Fourth, because every situation carries with it a family of emotions, it forces us to think of emotions as they appear: in bunches. It is easily recognizable that one may not be able to learn to feel sad without having also felt happy, frustrated, etc. In this respect emotions function like colours: though one can see red and isolate the colour red, it nevertheless always appears in a background of colours, which may change the perception of the colour red (making it look more orange-like, for example).

Fifth, designing emotional situations in this manner opens the way for an explanation of emotional maturity, for experiencing sad situations will hopefully change the impact of sadness when sadness is part of the family of an emotional situation of grief.

Sixth, it provides a more complex way to explain how emotions resonate. For feeling like crying because I see someone else crying varies in intensity to the extent which the situation resonates with me.

The most interesting aspect of designing the pattern of emotion is that it may provide a unifying tool of research for theories of emotion by showing that different philosophies of emotion achieve different conclusions because they emphasize different moments of the pattern of emotion.

When one studies the philosophy of emotion, one is invaded by this weird feeling that different philosophers and different fields of research are saying different things about emotions, yet, they all seem somehow to be right. One solution for this is to conclude, like Paul Griffiths, that the overall category of emotions is too inclusive and that “the state of the field strongly suggests that the emotions are a collection of very different psychological phenomena, and that they cannot all be brought under a single theory” (Griffiths 1998, 202). The problem of adopting this solution is that it seems that the different aspects of emotional life interact in relevant ways (moods affect the way we feel emotions; emotional events affect moods, character, personality; emotions change the impact of other emotions, etc), and therefore, ignoring this dynamic nature of emotional life leaves us with the uncomfortable feeling that we are missing something. Therefore, even if we accept Griffiths’ claim that different emotional phenomena require different theoretical explanations, we may still want to account for the connections between these various phenomena.

That the pattern of emotion opens the possibility for a Unified Theory of Emotion is a promise that can only be fulfilled by exploring in more details the implications and its explanation provided by the pattern of emotion. To completely verify the validity of such a consequence of the design of the pattern of emotion one would have to make a complete map of all theories of emotion and verify 1) if different theories focus on different aspects of emotion and 2) if no one theory has some perspective that falls out of this pattern and reveals a trait of emotional life that cannot be included or analysed by the structure of the pattern of emotion.

II. EMOTIONAL GROWTH

What I want to do in this second half of the paper is to explore how thinking of emotions in terms of activity can provide a fruitful way to understand the process of emotional maturity.

1. Emotional maturity

What is emotional maturity? Certainly it includes some sense of self-control, for example, the ability to avoid having a tantrum when some specific wish fails to be satisfied or the ability to not kiss the stranger who helps us after a long day full of misfortunate events. It surely also includes the ability to feel taking more things into consideration, this means not only having a wider experience of emotions but also knowing which things to take into consideration. More riskily, we could say it also includes the ability for a selection of emotions. For example, I may feel irritated at the police officer who fines me on something I see other people do all the time without getting a fine, yet it is inadequate to let the irritation become anger and be mad at the police officer even though one may be quite right in feeling angry. Nevertheless, this maturity is not an all or nothing item. Clearly, one can be emotional mature about certain types of situations and be quite infantile about others. In summary, it is quite difficult to have a clear-cut image of emotional maturity. Nevertheless, we clearly acquire some maturity as we grow up (even the most infantile of people do).

One way to clarify the meaning of emotional maturity is to think of how children learn about emotions. In a book for parents entitled *How to Talk so Kids will Listen & Listen so Kids will Talk*, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish make some interesting comments about children and emotions. The goal of the book is to help parents to communicate better with their children by creating skills that enhance and skills that avoid hindrances to communication. A big part of the book focuses on showing how parents can educate children about their feelings by pointing out that a lot of educational practices (in fact, very well intended parenting) confuses and denies children their feelings, and by offering certain general attitudes to help parents avoid such common mistakes. I do not want to critically explore this book but only to point out that the advices they give embody a very interesting attitude towards emotions. Faber and Mazlish advice parents to be very descriptive about the emotional situation at hand, and they encourage parents to show they are listening by

showing signs of their acknowledgement of their children's feelings by showing that those emotions resonate with the parents (for example, by saying "oh!", "how terrible", "how exciting", etc. when children talk). Finally, Faber and Mazlish insist that parents should give a name to the child's feeling, a word that describes what he or she might be feeling. For example, if the child says, "The bus driver yelled at me and everybody laughed," the parent may respond, "That must have been embarrassing" or "sounds as if that was embarrassing." The book points out that a lot of parenting mistakenly assumes that emotions are clear and provides advices to show parents how emotions can be clarified by pointing out things, showing empathy, provide means for emotion release, etc. Interestingly, a lot of the advices given in the book become clearer if we take emotional experiences to have a pattern such as the one described earlier. For example, the advices that call attention to the situation provide a way to build a wider family of emotions as well as create a narrative of the given situation.

2. Stories: An experimental laboratory of emotions

Of course the question is: how do children become acquainted with emotions and their meanings when these practices proposed by the book are not in place. I think by story telling. I imagine no one thinks of challenging the importance of reading children's stories or challenge that they serve a variety of purposes, but what I want to propose here today is that children's stories teach something that cannot be substituted by a better means of communication between children and their parents. I want to argue that stories provide an experimental laboratory of emotions and embody a deliberate search of paradigm scenarios (De Sousa 1987).

As I stated earlier, the proposed pattern of emotion fits remarkably well with Ronald de Sousa notion of paradigm scenario presented in his book *The Rationality of Emotions* (1987). He writes,

My hypothesis is this: We are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with *paradigm scenarios*. These are drawn first from our daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which we are exposed. Later still, in literate cultures, they are supplemented and refined by literature. Paradigm scenarios involve two aspects: first, a situation type providing the characteristic *objects* of the specific emotion-type (where objects can be of the various sorts identified in chapter 5), and second, a set of characteristic or "normal" *responses* to the situation, where normality is first a biological matter and then very quickly becomes a cultural one (De Sousa 1987, 182).

I think it is accurate to state that we become acquainted with the vocabulary of emotion through paradigm scenarios but I think the story of how these paradigms are drawn is more complex than De Sousa describes them. It is not simply that stories reinforce paradigm scenarios, though I'm sure that experience before story telling is crucial for emotional relevance of stories. However, I think, they also introduce new paradigms that are reinforced by daily life (or not), that is stories point out possibilities of paradigms as well as complexity of paradigms. There is probably a creative process of what these paradigm scenarios consist of between stories and daily events. And only this explains that, as De Sousa writes, "A paradigm can always be challenged in the light of a wider range of considerations than are available when the case is viewed in isolation." (De Sousa 1987, 187) Consequently, part of understanding well the notion of paradigm scenarios is to understand their malleability and how they function as models of emotional life, just as we have models of molecules to understand certain chemical reactions. However, to understand models properly requires understanding how they are used in laboratory practices, and how these practices are connected to life occurrences.

If stories make up an emotional laboratory it is crucial to understand how we incorporate the so-called fiction into the so-called reality. A quick look into the paradox of fiction may help us to clarify the dynamic creation of paradigm scenarios. The paradox can be stated in form of a question: How can we intelligibly have emotions for fictional persons or situations, given that we do not believe in their existence? (Levinson 1998, 273)

The pattern of emotion provides a new answer for this paradox, which I shall call the Experimental Answer. The Experimental Answer argues that we have emotions for fictional persons and situations because they make part of the way we learn and refine having feelings for persons and situations that are not fictional. Let us simplistically try to exemplify this learning process: an infant may begin to feel fear after a startling loud sound, after she is told a story where a character (bunny) hears a loud noise and reacts similarly to the infant's memory of her reaction. The story names such feeling as fear. Later, when she hears a startling noise, she will be able to answer "yes" to the question "Were you scared?" De Sousa's claims that stories later reinforce paradigm scenarios but, I think, it is more correct to say that stories with daily events help to construct these paradigm scenarios by calling attention to certain aspects of daily life, by allowing us to construe them with a certain amount of malleability. Needless to say, the process of learning and developing emotional paradigm scenarios is not as simplistic as the example given. Also, the process indicated will get more and more complex as the infant/child/adolescent/adult acquires more experience.

This Experimental Answer to the paradox of fiction also explains the paradox of tragedy¹. If fictional stories are a type of emotional laboratory then it is reasonable that we would give a privileged place to negative emotions. For though we do not want to live them, they represent a crucial part of emotional growth, just as it is crucial to study controlled explosions in the laboratory when one studies chemistry.

There is another aspect of emotional growth that is given by stories: the acquisition of emotional language. If De Sousa is correct in claiming that we become acquainted with the vocabulary of emotion by association with paradigm scenarios, and if I am correct in adding that the construction of these paradigms is made through fiction, then it is not surprising to find that literature about children's emotional growth points out again and again how language acquisition is crucial for emotional growth (Oatley & Jenkins 1996, 181, 187, 191, 202-203, 227).

I want to propose that being able to talk about emotions (saying one is scared, describing situations of fear, telling a scary story, etc) allows us to better grasp, explore, and experiment paradigm scenarios. That is, language is a tool of emotional life that helps to modify and solidify emotional activity because it allows us to describe emotional situations and such descriptions are simultaneously explanations and revelations about the situation at stake. The creative participation of language in emotional life lies in the ability of language to 1) direct attention in a specific situation, 2) naming the salient comparisons and contrasts with other emotional situation, 3) be part of the group of consequences (for example, making it possible to say "I'm sorry") and allow enumeration of different consequences, and finally 4) allow the construction of a narrative in different ways, which means that somehow language is able to mimic the evaluative processes that underlies emotional activity. This last contribution of language partly explains why one can overcome emotional difficulties by talking about emotionally problematic events. At the same time, talking about such events is not sufficient², for after one uses language to re-created the paradigm

¹ "The paradox is the following: Art that is negatively emotional, that is, art that represents, expresses or otherwise deals with emotions such as shame, grief, horror, sorrow, anger, remorse, despair and the like, seems to have a propensity to elicit parallel responses in appreciators. But if that is so, one would expect appreciators to avoid, or at any rate, judge as inferior, art of this nature. Yet not only they do not so, but often they hold such art to be the highest or most rewarding of all." (Levinson 1998, 278)

² As Newirth argues in his book *Between Emotion and Cognition. The Generative Unconscious*. He writes, "I have argued against the analytic injunction to make the unconscious conscious and have rather presented a neo-Kleinian argument for making consciousness unconscious. My paradoxical playing with Freud's famous statement is an attempt to rethink the linked concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness, subjectivity and objectivity, reality and fantasy, and the paranoid-schizoid and depressive modes of experience. It is the development of this active capacity for the creation of meaning ... that I have thought of as the subject of the unconscious, as each participant in the psychoanalytic dialogic attempts to speak from his unconscious symbolic perspective, the generative unconscious."

scenario of a certain emotional situation one still has to return to the daily life and experiment living with the reassessed paradigm scenario.

In summary, not only language is a tool for exploring the emotional world but language is a tool that can emulate the evaluative process that underlies emotional activity, and consequently allow not only a better experimentation of the complex identity of paradigm scenarios but also a creative tool for handling emotional difficulties.

III. CONCLUSIONS

When De Sousa introduces the notion of paradigm scenarios he claims that what follows from then on can be viewed as the first steps in search of a semantics of emotions (De Sousa 1987, 181). I want to suggest that the pattern of emotion is a better way to devise such semantic approach, namely because it allows us to include a notion of subject within the situation and perhaps give another solution to the status of “normality” identified by De Sousa (De Sousa 1987, 177, 182, 202). However, in order to clearly argue for this the various steps identified in the pattern of emotion must be further developed. Among other things, the process of forming families of emotions must be elaborated (and this might open the possibility for a more satisfying taxonomy of emotions), one needs to work out what does it mean to compare and contrast the situation with other situations as well as clarify how one works out possible consequences of tension. Once these steps are further developed there will be an organized background that may allow us to explain in more detail how emotions carry a narrative format, which is something many philosophers of emotion claim but most of them do not fully explain³.

I conclude by pointing out that the pattern of emotion is an interesting hypothesis for the philosophy of emotions because it enables us to think of emotion as activity and overcome a misconception, pointed out by Dewey, of considering emotions as being as simple as compact as the names we have for them (LW10:49)

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³ Different philosophers claim the narrative character of emotion. For instance, Nussbaum when she writes “Emotions, we now can see, have a narrative structure” (Nussbaum 2001, 236), or when De Sousa points out that, “we acquire the capacity to talk about emotions in terms of the stories that give rise to them” (De Sousa 1987, 183), or when Baier writes,

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