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THE PLOT THICKENS—OR NOT: PROTONARRATIVES OF EMOTIONS AND THE CHINESE PRINCIPLE OF SAVORING



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Summary

What are emotions good for? This article makes the radical claim that the primary function of emotion is not merely to serve the purpose of coping and adaptation, but to foster an expansion of experience and consciousness that contribute importantly to a subjective self, without which biological survival would be meaningless. This argument is inspired by the Chinese notion of aesthetic savoring, which is explicated by a phenomenological account of “protonarratives” of emotions. Protonarratives are “small stories” that are more creative than full fledged narratives, partly because of their successful resistance against the latter’s *telos*. By keeping the narrative impulses to the minimum, and by resisting the temptation of the plot to “thicken,” protonarratives reduce our risk of submitting to compulsory outcomes—such as action and problem solving—of the emotion narrative. This phenomenological analysis of savoring concludes with a discussion of its implications for the psychology of emotion.

Keywords: *narrative; protonarrative; endocept; aesthetic savoring; emotional creativity; emotion as “psychological way station”*

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“Protonarratives” are what Mark Turner (1996) refers to as “small stories,” background events that are seemingly neutral in affect, such as, “The wind blows clouds through the sky, a child throws a rock . . .” and so on (p. 13). Going to the mailbox or going to work are other examples given by Philip Lewin. These events or units of activity “need not have any particular determinate meaning,” says Lewin (1997), because they are “themes that have not yet crystallized into particular experiential configuration. Only as they are incorporated into one of a number of potential *narrative threads* do they become *determinate*” (p. 1; italics added). These seemingly uneventful events that may or may not be emplotted into the narrative of the so-called basic emotions are nonetheless pregnant with meaning when the potential for savoring is open to them.

In contrast to narratives that are oriented around actions and explicit aims, protonarratives are related less to specifically goal-oriented affects and more to background moods (Sundararajan, 2000) or “endocepts” (Arieti, 1976; Averill & Nunley, 1992). Protonarratives allow ambiguity and exploration of multiple nuanced meanings and thus invite us to bypass simplistic misunderstandings of intentionality of the affective life. They are less oriented toward achieving specific goals that we value and more toward enhancing the experiencing of the value of that which we value, whatever it might be. For all these reasons, protonarrative can enrich our emotional experiences. To show how such barely minimum structures serve the purpose of emotions, on one hand, and challenge certain received wisdom in the field of emotion research, on the other, I present my argument in three parts: Part 1 gives a phenomenological account of protonarratives of emotions; Part 2 casts the phenomena in the theoretical framework of the Chinese principle of savoring; Part 3 discusses the implications of savoring for psychology of emotions.

PROTONARRATIVES OF EMOTIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

A phenomenological account of the protonarrative may start with the following leave-taking scene at a preschool, which lasts no more than 3 seconds and seems to be “uneventful” enough to qualify as a protonarrative (see appendix):

The father opens the door and the child enters the room, turns and looks back, father waves goodbye, and child continues on into the room as father closes the door and leaves. (Peery, 1978, p. 59)

However, under the closer scrutiny of “frame-by-frame analysis,” the researcher discerned affective undercurrents that render this small story a protonarrative that borders on the verge of a full-fledged narrative.

In the following, I cast (in brackets) the researcher’s account (Peery, 1978, p. 60) in the framework of narrative structure. A narrative structure, according to Mancuso and Sarbin (1998, p. 302), requires the following elements to make a “good” story:

1. The setting of a story [the heroine is being dropped off by father at preschool].
2. The initiating event [“The daughter, after entering the play school a few steps, turns and faces her father . . .”]
3. Goal setting [she wanted to be with the father a little longer, as evidenced by her “showing ambivalence about entering the school and leaving her father”]
4. Descriptions of goal-directed conduct and an outcome of the conduct [“She discontinues her leave-taking behavior and initiates an approach toward father. Father clearly indicates he is not available and will not reciprocate her approach, ‘pushing’ her back into the room.”]
5. An ending [“Daughter accepts this signal without fuss and turns back, completing the leave-taking sequence.”]

Here we have a “minimal narrative in a completed form” (Todorov, 1972, p. 440). “This impression of completion,” writes Todorov,

is caused by a modified repetition of the initial clause; the first and the last clause will be identical but they will either have a different mood or status, for instance, or they will be seen from different points of view. (p. 440)

The story begins with the heroine entering the room and ends with her moving “more fully into the room” (Peery, 1978, p. 60). Between these two identical clauses spans a syncope of desire—the child had temporarily relinquished her attachment to her father pursuant to the leave-taking schema.

However, there is a fluid boundary between narrative and protonarrative. Should we continue with the microanalytic intent to scrutinize ever smaller units of meaning in this leave-taking scene, we would arrive at protonarratives once again. Let us scale down to the duration of a fraction of a second, from Drawings 3 to 4 of the film in Peery (1978; see appendix):

Beginning at Drawing 3 and continuing to Drawing 4, the daughter approaches her father slightly. At precisely the same moment (Frame 137) that the daughter begins her approach, the father takes his hand from the doorknob and raises it to the position shown in Drawing 4. This movement by the father is the beginning of a wave goodbye; but it is also very similar to the action of a policeman when stopping traffic at an intersection. (p. 59)

The scenario depicted in Drawing 4 (Frame 142) may be considered, in the words of Blanchot (1951/1985), “the absolutely dark moment of the plot” (p. 73), where there is “a terrible pause in which nothing stops” (p. 70). In fact, quite on the contrary, everything seems to be racing to a crescendo: The child is squarely facing her father, as if having something important to say; the father hastily waves his hand, obviously not in a mood to reciprocate her attention. The temptation to spin an attachment narrative is almost irresistible at this point. The story must continue. What are the father’s “feelings toward his daughter”? The researcher wanted to know: “What is his standard mode of interaction—cold and abrupt, as seen from our example, or warm and responsive in other settings? What does the daughter expect from her father? Are her emotional needs being fulfilled in their relationship?” (Peery, 1978, p. 61).

“The continuation? Unfortunately this isn’t a story,” says Blanchot (1951/1985, p. 33) in his antinarrative story, “When the Time Comes.” Story, it need not be. The scenario depicted in Drawing 4 has become a protonarrative of emotions instead.

Protonarratives of emotions are saturated with multiple nuanced feeling tones such that they may best be understood in terms of endocepts (Arieti, 1976; Averill & Nunley, 1992). Endocepts are amorphous cognitive-affective structures, defined by Getz and Lubart (1998a) as “idiosyncratic, multi-aspectual emotional profiles” associated with a concept or image (p. 3). The authors give as example the poetic image of “tigers selling their stripes.” This image evokes a multiplicity of emotional undercurrents that can best be expressed by a conglomeration of themes such as “waste-of-beauty-and-power/abandonment-of-sophistication/pity-for-diminishment” (p. 4). Note that these thematic elements are devoid of temporal causal connections. This marks the major difference between narrative and protonarrative, a difference that coincides with that between narrative and descriptive texts. According to the Russian formalist Boris Tomashevsky (1965), in narrative texts, “causal-temporal relationships exist between the thematic elements,” whereas in “descriptive” texts, “the thematic elements are contemporaneous,” or arranged without “causal connections” (p. 16).

Now let us reconsider Drawing 4 (see appendix):

At precisely the same moment (Frame 137) that the daughter begins her approach, the father takes his hand from the doorknob and raises it to the position shown in Drawing 4. This movement by the father is the beginning of a wave goodbye; but it is also very similar to the action of a policeman when stopping traffic at an intersection. (Peery, 1978, p. 59)

This account consists of a juxtaposition of two protonarratives: the child about to give free reign to her affective expressions and the father making a gesture that says at once “stop” and “goodbye.” This scenario has the potential to become a protonarrative of emotions if we take the following steps: (a) we do not run with the narrative impulse to emplot it into a leave-taking story but instead pause to savor its multiple and nuanced affective undercurrents, (b) we do not collapse contradictions into a narrative unity but instead let the incident keep its indignation and scandal, and (c) we refuse to yield to the pressure of the narrative thrust to move hastily to problem solving but instead slow down to circumambulate this “absolutely dark moment of the plot.” Then chances are that the plot will not thicken into a leave-taking narrative but instead fritter into a multitude of “emotional profiles” known as endocepts.

To illustrate this point, I turn to a poet who has mastered the art of protonarratives of emotions, the 9th-century Chinese poet and critic Ssu-K'ung Tu (837–908). In the following paragraphs, I choose for analysis one of Ssu-K'ung Tu's poems, titled “Self-Possession.” My interpretation of the poem consists of only a summary account of the general consensus among the commentators. For more detailed exegesis, the reader is referred to Owen (1992, pp. 311-312).

Consider the following lines in “Self-Possession”:

Fine words rush to the lips:
A great river stretches before our eyes. (Yip, 1969, p. 281)

In juxtaposition, without any apparent causal connections, is the image of a poet in the throes of an affective expression, and that of a river, powerful and intimidating, cutting across his path. The emotional profile of this scenario resonates well—indeed, association by resonance is the way endocepts work (Getz & Lubart, 1998b)—with that of the preschooler in Drawing 4. In both the Chinese poem and Drawing 4, we witness the all-too-human drama of a certain nameless desire teetering at the edge of a boundary that it cannot and must not cross. In this “absolutely dark moment of the plot” lies the

seeds of multiple emotional narratives: anger, frustration, resentment, hurt, abandonment, loss, and grief, to name just a few prominent possibilities. Out of this plethora of virtual emotional narratives, one materialized for the preschooler: quiet resignation.

The daughter begins turning her head away from the father and rotating her torso back into the room. By Drawing 5 she is no longer looking at her father. (Peery, 1978, p. 60)

Likewise, the poet who was about to wax eloquent suddenly fell silent, as the commentators have noted. This syncope of desire is conceptualized by the poet as a manifestation of self-composure, which constitutes the title, “Self-Possession,” and theme of his poem. The defining feature of self-composure seems to be successful management of emotionally stressful situations. As Owen (1992) rightly points out, “The condition is predicated on a certain tension, a self-assurance that proves itself by overcoming the threat of depression” (p. 312). Here is one example of self-composure from the poem:

Sea-winds, blue clouds,
A bright moon among isles at night. (Yip, 1969, p. 281)

Winds sweeping across the ocean, clouds drifting in the azure sky, the bright moonlight falls silently on the isles at night. This concatenation of protonarratives evokes, according to the commentators, the emotional profile of serenity and quiet illumination, tinged with a profound sense of loneliness. These are supposedly nuanced feeling tones, or endocepts, associated with the self-composure of managing the stressful situation of not being able to give free reign to one’s affective expressions (“Fine words rush to the lips/A great river stretches before our eyes”).

But there is more to the theme of self-composure:

No wild goose brings message here;
He is far away, traveling.
My thoughts bring him near,
As if we were together now forever. (Yip, 1969, p. 281)

In another emotionally stressful situation—not having heard from the beloved who is traveling far away—self-composure consists in taking consolation from the fact that in thoughts the beloved is as close as in days gone by. Endocepts, or the emotional undercurrents, of self-composure in this scenario are, according to the commentators, feelings of sadness without despair, grief without resentment.

And still more:

Green woods, among them a hut.
 Setting sun, around it clear air.
 Head-dress off, to stroll alone;
 At times, a bird chirps. (Yip, 1969, p. 281)

A rustic hut in the green forest, the sun is setting, the air refreshingly clear, taking a walk, alone, in sheer abandonment, the only sound one hears is birds chirping from time to time. According to the commentators, this scenario highlights another emotional profile of self-composure—feelings of serenity, solitude, and good cheer coming from a sense of inner freedom.

All this time, throughout the lengthy cogitations of self-composure, the plot fails to thicken. Instead of a narrative, we have here a veritable explosion of emotional protonarratives. Note how the above scenarios are not anchored in the temporal-causal chain of events but instead wander freely like “an image wandering among images and drawn along with them in the monotony of a movement that appears to have no conclusion just as it had no beginning” (Blanchot, 1951/1985, pp. 70-71). The yoke of the narrative telos is broken.

That a momentary syncope of desire should have spawned such a plethora of emotional profiles might be beyond the wildest imagination of the preschooler who opted for silent resignation in the wake of her failure to forestall leave taking. Neither would Mr. Jones in the following account be able to conceive of any other alternatives to his emotional narrative:

Albert Jones, a steamfitter, was engaged in a heated quarrel with Donald Miller, a co-worker, over responsibility for a botched-up job. Employing Anglo-Saxon expletives, Miller pointedly insulted Jones with a well-recognized digital gesture. Without hesitation, Jones struck Miller on the head with a fourteen-inch pipe wrench. When Jones subsequently explained his action to a police officer, he said, “I just felt the anger surging up in me and I exploded.” (Sarbin, 1989, pp. 186-187)

As Sarbin points out rightly, insults call for retaliation. “In the fast moving scenario, the form of retaliation chosen by Jones was direct assault. The protocol is silent whether Jones entertained attenuated forms of retaliation such as verbal put-down, reciprocal insult, or challenge to a duel” (Sarbin, 1989, p. 187). Sarbin (1989) further makes the important point that

it is not the case that “insult” stands alone, or that “retaliation” stands alone, or that the observations identified as anger are

detachable from insult and retaliation. All these features are integral to the emplotment of an anger narrative. They are learned as a unity and perceived as a unity. (p. 187)

Indeed, as the anger narrative of Mr. Jones makes so clear, narrative unity is not without its dark side. Structurally speaking, unity has to do with “compositional motivation,” which dictates, as Tomashevsky (1965), paraphrasing Chekhov, puts it, that “if one speaks about a nail beaten into a wall at the beginning of a narrative, *then* at the end the hero must hang himself on that nail” (p. 79, italics added). This may be one of the reasons why violence becomes almost ineluctable in the consummation of anger narratives. For Mr. Jones to resist the temptation of submitting to compulsory outcomes of the narrative telos, for him to reconsider other possibilities of retaliation, or even the possibility of a different emotional narrative altogether, he would do well to retrace his steps. He needs to go backward in time, to revisit that “absolutely dark moment of the plot” where multiple possibilities exist in juxtaposition, “where,” as Arieti (1976) puts it so eloquently in the context of endocept, “suspense and indeterminacy reign, where simultaneity fuses with sequential time and unsuspected transmutations occur” (p. 62).

This is exactly what the poet did in the Chinese poem, the sequence of which is tantamount to moving backward from Drawing 5 to Drawing 4 in Peery’s account of the leave-taking scene, from the syncope of desire (the preschooler turned away from her father) to the moment of the insurmountable obstacle (the child attempted to approach the father who was not likely to reciprocate her attention). I have been quoting the Chinese poem in reverse order. The following is the poem, in its original sequence:

Self-Possession

Green woods, among them a hut.
Setting sun, around it clear air.
Head-dress off, to stroll alone;
At times, a bird chirps.

No wild goose brings message here;
He is far away, traveling.
My thoughts bring him near,
As if we were together now forever.

Sea-winds, blue clouds,
A bright moon among isles at night.
Fine words rush to the lips:
A great river stretches before our eyes. (Yip, 1969, p. 281)

In contradistinction to the narrative movement, this poem seems to proceed backward from the solution to the problem. An enchanting series of soothing and idyllic scenarios have we encountered—enjoying the solitude of an evening walk (first stanza); being united with the beloved in thought, if not in person (second stanza); and taking consolation in the serenity of quiet illumination (third stanza)—only to be perturbed at the end by an emotional dilemma, which after all is said and done about self-composure, threatens to wreck our tranquility like a tenacious insomnia that no amount of halcyon imageries can ever hope to hypnotize. But why? Why does the poetic consciousness insist on doubling back to this “absolutely dark moment of the plot,” turning it into “the floating festival of an instant that no longer passes” (Blanchot, 1951/1985, p. 71)? The answer, I think, lies in the fact that this “absolutely dark moment of the plot” constitutes, to borrow a term from dynamic systems theory, the “bifurcating point,” in which multiple future emotional narratives subsist. According to Briggs and Peat (1989), “At each bifurcation point in our system’s past, a flux occurred in which many futures existed. Through the system’s iteration and amplification [or shall we say emplotting?], one future [for instance, quiet resignation] was chosen and the other possibilities vanished forever [temper tantrums, crying spells, etc.]” (p. 144). Might it not be that our agency and freedom are at stake, whenever we fail to complete our circumambulation around a gripping emotional protonarrative in our lives? Indeed, much is at stake, as Sarbin (1989) points out, if we as “agents” “grip” too hastily “a narrative plot” (p. 199). Averill and Nunley (1992) put the matter simply and straightforwardly: “Emotional creativity is about *choice*” (p. 304). The poet says as much when he gently invites us to circumambulate once more that “absolutely dark moment of the plot,” so as to linger just a little longer at that single instant, where “the future is not bound to it but unbound from it” (Blanchot, 1951/1985, p. 73).

In conclusion, small is beautiful. Protonarratives of emotions are small stories, or minimum units of meaning, that are gravid with multiple and nuanced emotional undercurrents. So far as the narrative cargo is concerned, these small stories are lightweight—tentative and insubstantial as if “a sub-being is trying itself out as being,” to borrow a felicitous expression from Bachelard (1969, p. 111). In the emotional landscape of our lives, these lightweight stories are often found wafting with dizzying indeterminacy at the bifurcating point of an event, where in the explosion of “a large number of ever finer less intense emotional nuances” (Gray, 1979, p. 3), “all the emergences of the human” seem to be “trying itself

[*sic*] out as being,” to borrow another intuitive expression from Bachelard (1969, p. 111). Accessible perhaps only to a contemplative mind versed in the circumambulatory movement of self-reflexive thought, these small stories are indispensable to our freedom in a twofold sense of the word: freedom from compulsive outcomes of the conventional narratives of emotions and freedom for an emotionally creative life.

THE CHINESE PRINCIPLE OF “SAVORING”

The protonarratives of emotions in Ssu-k’ung T’u’s works have been understood by the poet and others as illustrative examples of the aesthetic principle of “savoring” (for details, see Sundararajan, 2004). Well known as the critic of “aesthetic savoring,” Ssu-k’ung T’u has written, “In my opinion we can adequately speak of poetry only in terms of making distinctions in flavors” (Owen, 1992, p. 351). In his letter to a certain Mr. Li, he expounded his theory of “flavor beyond flavor” with the following statement: “The people of Chiang-ling are incapable of making any finer distinctions. Their palate somehow falls short of perfect excellence and lacks something between ‘the merely sour’ and ‘the merely salty’” (Owen, 1992, p. 351).

Translated into the framework of contemporary theories, the capacity for savoring or the lack thereof pertains to the notion of “emotional acuity” as conceptualized by Gelernter (1994). Especially relevant are the following components of emotional acuity: (a) that you are able to register subtle or nuanced emotions—to experience subtle emotional reactions—whereas less acute people would have no emotional reaction at all; and (b) that you are able to distinguish many elements in a subtle emotional palette, whereas a less acute person would distinguish the emotional equivalent of red, green, and blue (Gelernter, 1994, pp. 89-90). The parallelism between Ssu-k’ung T’u’s “flavor beyond flavor” and Gelernter’s analogy of color discrimination is striking: The ideal poet, according to Ssu-k’ung T’u, is one who is able to make subtle discriminations beyond the emotional equivalent of saltiness or sourness. Owen (1992) explains,

The opposition is between gross categories that have names, and fine judgments for which there are no names. Furthermore, those finer gradations are learned by experience: one who knows only the gross categories can apprehend only the gross categories; to be able to recognize the finer distinctions requires the education of a sensibility. (p. 352)

“Exactly this kind of sensitivity lies at the root of creativity,” writes Gelernter (1994, p. 90) in reference to subtle discrimination of emotional nuances.

By “flavor beyond flavor,” Ssu-k’ung T’u also implies that the object of savoring—the poetic moods—is to be found in a realm beyond the senses (Wu, 1963). In other words, poetic moods are mental constructions, rather than preexisting entities “out there” to be discovered by the senses such as taste or smell. Paraphrasing Nietzsche—“Some souls one will never discover, unless one invents them first” (cited in Averill & Nunley, 1992, p. 135)—it may be said that to savor poetic moods, one has to create them first. Thus with the thesis of “flavor beyond flavor,” Ssu-k’ung T’u was able to eat the cake and have it too: to take advantage of the metaphor of savoring without falling prey to its tacit implication of a preexisting entity as the object of savoring.

Developmentally, emotional acuity belongs to the last stage of emotional development called the “nuancing and meditational phase” in William Gray’s (1979) theoretical framework. According to Gray,

The basic global emotions differentiate during child development into a large number of ever finer less intense emotional nuances, or feeling tones, of precise, sharply defined quality, and that these become patterned in a nearly infinite number of ways to constitute an emotional language for coding cognitive experience. (p. 3).

To differentiate these “ever finer less intense emotional nuances” is the task of the nuancing and meditational phases, says William Gray:

By nuancing I mean that the feeling tone becomes subtle in its differentiation, becomes recognizable as a very particular form. Then there is the last stage, the meditational one, in which the nuanced feeling tone is held in awareness or alternately in the preconscious state. (p. 3).

This capacity to reflect on one’s feelings is referred to by Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, and Palfai (1995) as the reflective meta-cognition of mood that attends to moods and emotions, discriminates clearly among them, and regulates them—a capacity essential to emotional intelligence.

From the foregoing analysis of the protonarratives, the characteristics of savoring may be summed up as follows: First, savoring is the ability to appreciate and derive aesthetic pleasure from negative events as well as positive ones, in contrast

to the formulation of positive psychology (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), in which savoring is confined to positive experiences only. Second, savoring has a reflexive dimension that entails a competence of deriving pleasure from awareness of pleasure. Third, one of the preconditions of savoring seems to be attention to experience. In this respect, savoring may be understood as a particular mode of emotional action that has no other aim than to increase pleasant experience, independent of consumption. It derives its lack of overt action not from suppression of action but from giving priority to experience and awareness. In the final analysis, savoring expands the world of experience, leading from pleasure to meaning, thereby contributing to a sense of self that is worth having.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

Clinical Implications

The therapeutic potential of savoring can be elucidated by a brief examination of the similarities and differences between savoring and contemporary Western psychological interventions. First of all, savoring is different from emotion regulation. Emotion regulation is defined by Gross (1998) as “processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). This utilitarian approach to experience is not shared by savoring. The difference between the two approaches to experience—utilitarian versus participatory—is summed up by James Averill in terms of that between a vintner and a connoisseur:

The vintner may know all about the production of fine wines but have little appreciation for fine nuances in flavor; his aim is simply to control the processes of production. By contrast, the connoisseur may know little about how wine is produced, and yet have great appreciation for differences in flavor among wines. In the Chinese tradition of savoring, the goal is not so much to regulate one's emotions, but to become an emotional connoisseur. (personal communication, September 2005)

Second, savoring has some affinities with cognitive therapies that use the experiential self-focus approach (Teasdale, 1999) that emphasizes attention to the experience of feelings (Watkins & Moulds, 2005). But these approaches usually constitute mindfulness-based cognitive

therapy (Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Soulsby, 2000), which is quite different from savoring. Savoring does not share with mindfulness-based therapy an invested interest in down regulation of emotion, which refers to regulation strategies geared toward the inhibition or attenuation of emotional arousal. That mindfulness meditation may involve regulation strategies that reduce arousal, enhance positive affect, and prohibit feeling states from being elaborated by cognitive appraisals of valence is borne out by a study of Nielsen and Kaszniak (2006), who found that long-term meditators were not as sensitive to subtle emotional feelings as nonmeditators.

Although wide margins of overlap and affinity with savoring can be found in experiential and existential therapists of many orientations (e.g., Bugental, 1987; May, 1981), the psychotherapy approach developed by Gendlin (1981), called focusing, is the most articulate translation of this notion (see Sundararajan, 2001). The following instruction in focusing, for example, is a good approximation of savoring:

Clear a space, stack all your troubles to one side, sit quietly and receptively. Then repeat [to yourself] the most feeling-filled words you have, slowly, a dozen times or so: "I'm scared of it . . . scared of it . . ." And all the time, keep some questions hovering around the words: What is this "scared"? What does it feel like, inside? Where do I feel it? (Gendlin, 1981, p. 90)

According to Gendlin (1981), this intrapersonal repetition is a self-reflexive feedback loop that is able to eventually insert a space, a gap, into the assumed unity between words and feeling: "At first the words and feeling may be exactly all one, but after a while you will find the feeling growing somewhat longer, sticking out around the edges of the words" (p. 90). This attempt to get beyond the words to immerse more deeply in the ineffable substrata of experience constitutes savoring.

In savoring, the self-reflexive turn of consciousness consists of a shift of attention on two axes: from external to internal and from physical to mental. Both movements are well articulated by Gendlin's notion of "inward sensing." The first term of the compound "*inward sensing*" refers to the inward turn of attention from the external environment to internal experiences. Thus Gendlin (1962/1997) writes, "Experiencing is simply feeling, as it concretely exists for us *inwardly*, and as it accompanies every lived aspect of what we are and mean and perceive" (p. 15; italics

added). The second term of the compound “inward *sensing*” stresses the fact that the self-reflexive turn is simultaneously a transition from the physical to the mental. In cognitive terms, this signifies a transition from the sensory experience of physical objects to the nonsensory experience of meaning (Mangan, 2001).

Rogers (1959) draws a distinction between two types of information processing strategies: “defensiveness” versus “openness to experience.” According to Pribram and McGuinness (1975), defensive information processing is characterized by

a defensive “effort” to cope with the situation . . . to shut off further input, and is reflected in an elevated heart rate and other changes indicative of a lack of readiness to respond meaningfully to the input. (p. 123)

Savoring, in contrast, is a receptive mode of information processing, a “letting be” characterized by awareness and acceptance of one’s own emotional states, a capacity generally known as “affect tolerance” (see Krystal, 1988). Affect tolerance is best described by Hartman (1964) when he refers, in the context of Wordsworth’s poetry, to a consciousness that “expresses the freedom of a mind aware of itself, aware and not afraid of its moods or potentialities” (p. 12). The importance of affect tolerance (Krystal, 1988) is very well recognized in focusing, as a focusing trainer, Cornell (1996), puts it: “The inner climate of letting it inwardly be is necessary for inner change” (p. 16). And again, invoking the metaphor of “a welcoming presence,” Cornell writes, “A welcoming presence means you are interested in everything you become aware of inside. A welcoming presence gives it [each feeling] the space to be and breathe, evolve and transform” (p. 18).

Last, focusing shares with savoring the tendency to capitalize on the intimate connection between experience and learning. According to Balleine and Dickinson (1998), learning is contingent on consciousness of experience, which makes it possible for the organism to know what to pursue the next time and how to do it. In this light, it is reasonable to assume that a program designed to boost the second-order awareness of experience would facilitate learning. Whether this might be the rationale behind the promotion of savoring in Confucian poetics, we get a glimpse of how this works in the following vignette of a focusing session (Sundararajan, 2001).

The client began with complaints of intractable tension and anxiety (Sundararajan, 2001): “There’s a racing in my chest. Nothing we are doing is touching this. Nothing touches it” (p. 234). At the end

of the session, like all success stories, considerable symptom reduction was in evidence. The therapist then ended the session with the following statements:

So, Jean I want you to notice now. Your body feels a little bit better right now for these few minutes. We did get there. We did touch it and it has eased a little bit right now. I want you to notice, to pay attention to what that feels like. (p. 241)

This marks the difference between focusing and all the problem-solving-oriented therapies. The focusing therapist does help the client to resolve problems. But when the problem is resolved, the game is not over but has just begun: Now the client can pay attention to what focusing is all about—to savor the experience. Thus the therapist said once more at the conclusion of the session, “I want you to notice, to pay attention to *what that feels like*” (italics added).

Implications for Theory of Emotion

The notion of savoring is rich in implications for our understanding of emotions. From the perspective of dynamical systems theory, savoring is a good example of what Ellis (2005) refers to as “extropy,” which is defined as the natural tendency for organisms to prefer higher-energy, more complex ways of maintaining homeostasis over the lower-energy, less complex ones. Humans worldwide do not seem to rest content with the lower-energy way of maintaining homeostasis by consuming food; they inevitably develop culinary art to achieve the same goal (food consumption to stay alive) at a higher, more complex level of organization. Corresponding to these two levels of organization, Ellis makes the distinction between “value achieving” and “consummatory” versus “value affirming” and “nonconsummatory” activities. His analysis is applicable here. Food consumption is a consummatory behavior that satisfies the basic needs of the body. Savoring in contrast is a higher-level nonconsummatory activity: It is not needs based so much as wants or desire based. Savoring does not satisfy biological needs so much as stoke the desire, which seeks stimulation rather than consummation. From the perspective of basic needs, the value-affirming function of taste serves the value-achieving goal of consuming the foods deemed valuable by taste. At the higher, more complex level of organization as is the case with savoring, however, the value-affirming function of taste has become an end in itself,

such that the tight coupling, at the lower level of organization, between perception (taste) and action (food consumption) is loosened. This observation has implications for theories of emotion.

Phenomenologists who give priority to the value-affirming function of emotions—for instance, Heidegger's (1962) notion of the world-disclosing function of mood (see also Smith, 1981)—constitute a minority perspective. Psychological theories of emotions in general tend to privilege the action potential of emotions. For instance, Oatley (1992) proposes that “emotions function in the management of action when all the consequences of such action cannot be fully foreseen” (p. 24). He goes on to say that “emotions set the cognitive and bodily systems into certain modes of readiness for small sets of action patterns that have evolved to cope with specific kinds of juncture as they occur” (p. 36). A sociological variant of the theme is Sarbin's (1986) claim that emotions are stereotypical patterns of behaviors referred to as “identity roles”—roles such as the angry victim enacted by Mr. Jones—that help to maintain and enhance a person's identity and values. Against this received wisdom in the field, the notion of savoring puts a premium on the value-affirming function of affective perception over the value-achieving function of action.

Supporting evidence for the importance of savoring can be gleaned from Ramachandran and Hirstein's (1999) research on qualia and consciousness. The authors have shown that qualia is the interface between perception and action, such that “sensations which are qualia-laden afford the luxury of choice” (p. 92). This is consistent with the findings of other researchers (see Clore & Parrott, 1991; Robinson, 1998) that suggest that the function of subjectively experienced affect is to recruit controlled processing, such as making choices and finding alternatives.

In the final analysis, protonarratives of emotions pose the following question: What is the functional utility of parading a wide spectrum of action-readiness (Frijda, 1986), as Ssu-k'ung T'u was wont to do, rather than acting on a specific one, as Mr. Jones did only too well? A partial answer to this question is found in the notion of emotion as “a psychological way station,” which postulates that, as Clore and Ketelaar (1997) put it, “emotion evolved as protocognition, as a psychological way station between stimulus and response that afforded flexibility. Emotions can thus provide information and motivation, without triggering obligatory behavior” (p. 112). Scherer (1994) has suggested that the evolutionary function of emotion is to *decouple* a stimulus from a response. In preemotional organisms (roughly at the level of fish or amphibians), behavior is regulated by reflexes and fixed action

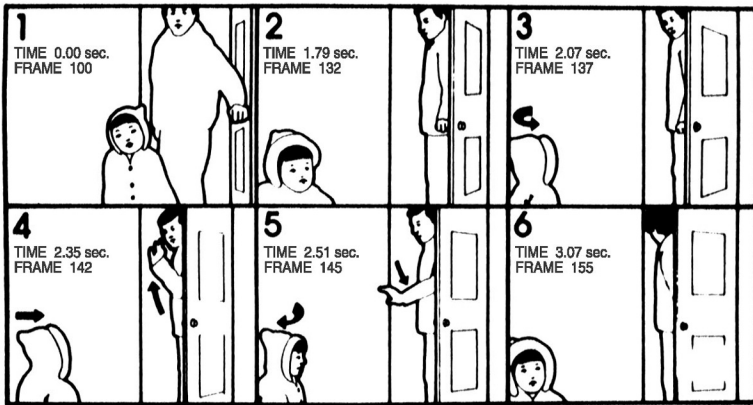
patterns, whether innate or learned. As we ascend the phylogenetic scale, the range of environments to which organisms can adapt becomes increasingly complex. This, according to Scherer (1994), presents an “engineering” problem—how to preserve the advantages of a quick and energetic response to potentially important events while at the same time introducing the flexibility needed to adapt to a range of environments. The solution to this problem, Scherer suggests, is the emotions. Emotions introduce a latency period that allows for a continuous appraisal and reappraisal of the situation and, concomitantly, the organization of appropriate responses. This process reaches its highest level in humans, which are the most emotional of species.

The way station theory—that emotion serves the purpose of better, more adaptive action—is not the whole story about emotions, however. Experiences of emotion serve a function far more important than coping and survival—they give individuals the reasons for wanting to survive in the first place. Humans don’t just survive; they survive as the particular persons that they are. To the extent that, as Humphrey (2006) points out, “it is our experience of the inner world that confirms the existence of the person” (p. 26), the crucial question is, as he puts it, “What is required of an experience if it is to be such that a subject can proudly be the subject of it?” (p. 125). The foregoing analysis suggests that experiences processed in the savoring mode are likely to fill the bill. Humphrey goes on to say that human beings, as subjects of such experiences, are likely to “gain new confidence and interest in their own personal survival” (pp. 125-126), because they have “a self worth having” (p. 125). Otherwise put, savoring suggests the possibility that biological survival depends on the well-being of a subjective self and not the other way around. This point finds an eloquent expression in the following lines of Gerard M. Hopkins:

Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came. (cited in Humphrey, 2006,
p. 134)

If a suggestion for future research on emotions is to be derived from this investigation of protonarratives and savoring, it would be something along the lines of the following advice from Frijda and Sundararajan (2007): “Examining all nooks and crannies of conscious experience in emotions appears to deliver more than focusing on information from the body and on the adaptive actions that such information allows” (p. 238).

APPENDIX



SOURCE: From “Magnification of Affect Using Frame-by-Frame Film Analysis,” by J. C. Peery, 1978, *Environmental Psychology and Nonverbal Behavior*, 3(1), p. 59. Copyright 1978 by Kluwer Academic/Plenum. Reprinted with permission.

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