

The Mechanics of Emotions

by Teodor Chiaburu

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Foreword

The aim of this work is to bring up a quite thought-provoking subject, namely the emotions of human beings. Although serious research has been conducted into this area of knowledge, people still don't know much about their own emotions. A layman has no idea what immense power lies within him, in the shape of emotions. If he knew that he can actually control his emotions and that his impulses, which often get the upper hand, can be redirected towards more noble purposes, he wouldn't have any reasons to complain about his inability to make the most out of his life. He would realize that he is in charge of his own destiny and that he can achieve remarkable things, just by controlling his own person.

My goal is to show you that your emotions and your way of conducting yourself are yours to control. You just have to press the right buttons and gain control of yourself. With enough motivation and the proper strategy, success will be yours.

CHAPTER 1: General Observations about Emotions

Imagine you're walking carefree along the avenue, at a moderate pace, now and then laying eyes on some displays in the store window. You turn the corner and out of nowhere, a villain pops out in front of you, brandishing a knife and demanding you to hand over all your money. What is your reaction? You might freeze and remain motionless or, scared out of your wits, start screaming and dashing away. Or on the contrary, the thief could act as a red rag to a bull and growing furious, you might attack him and make him feel sorry for his foolish robbery attempt.

In each of the foregoing cases, it is our emotions that come forth and bolster us, so that we can deal properly with the situation at hand. Human life devoid of emotions cannot be conceived, since they have played a pivotal part in our survival throughout the ages. Whether we like it or not, they are a fundamental part of our lives, defining who we are and how we conduct ourselves in different situations. Unbelievable as it may seem, we experience emotions in each and every second of the day; even at night, when dreaming, we sometimes go through a host of emotion-provoking projections. In fact, the quality of our entire living issues from the way we handle our emotional arsenal we are endowed with.

Our store of emotions is a double-edged sword, since it can act both as a life-saver and a life-ruiner, depending on how level-headedly it is put into use. Let's take anger as an example. If you were to be attacked outright and thus have your integrity menaced, responding back with rage is highly likely to repel the threat. Under these circumstances, violence used as a defensive weapon is absolutely acceptable. Since in this case your own life is in danger, fury plays the role of a life-saver.

But consider another situation. You are immersed in your work at the office, nearly strangled by the red tape. It's been a while since you've last taken a break and you're now pretty irritable. Then your cell phone rings; it's your wife. Ignoring the reason for her disturbing call, you don't answer the phone, but carry on working. You're now totally focused on those papers, but within minutes, a second call: again, your wife. "I told her I'm up to my ears in my project!", you say furiously to yourself and once again obstinately refuse to respond. After a while, the same ring tone. Driven to the edge of desperation, you madly pick up the phone and without any introductory politeness, you thoughtlessly retort your spouse: "For goodness' sake! Can't you see I'm busy! I don't care if I'm late for dinner! Stop pestering me!" Closed conversation. Now, was your anger truly of any aid in this case? On returning home, the chances are you'll feel pangs of remorse for having remonstrated with your wife. Not only did you hurt her

feelings, but now you are also guilt-ridden. She was just worried about you being late and was inquiring about you. She meant no harm, unlike the above mentioned attacker.

As you can see, emotions can be our best friends and our worst enemies at the same time. In a later chapter, I will outline why this is happening and whether we can control our emotional reactions, to avoid such embarrassing situations.

Positive vs Negative

You have certainly heard a lot of debate concerning the rejection of the so-called “negative emotions” and instead the attraction of the “positive” ones, since this is supposed to be the key to leading a thriving and joyful life. But how valid is this categorization of emotions into positive and negative? Which are which?

First and foremost, we need to be aware of what emotions we will consider for classification purposes.. **There are seven universal emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise and contempt.** All sorts of mixtures can originate from them. They are named *universal* because, as the reputed psychologist Paul Ekman discovered, they are present in all cultures all over the world and, furthermore, have similar

functionality and display manner (more about universality and peculiarities among different cultures later on).

Now that we know what emotions we are equipped with, let us take a closer look at them. Usually, the term “negative” is conducive to dim thoughts, being primarily linked to anything that’s bad, outrageous, unacceptable, harmful and so on (except for the medical analysis results, where “negative” actually means good news). Which one of these seven emotions seems to fit with this description, so that we can mark it irretrievably as “negative”? Presumably all but the emotions of happiness and , at least partly, surprise, right?

People usually regard happiness in general terms as the most pleasurable experience. This outlook is perfectly understandable at first glance. I mean, is there anybody who dislikes feeling happy, fulfilled, satisfied, enchanted, name it whatever you like? I don’t think so. When it comes to surprise, there is, however, a bit of a debate, since whenever you ask somebody what their attitude towards surprises is, they would commonly respond that it depends on the nature of that surprise. Hence the wide spread belief that a surprise can be either positive or negative.

Concentrating now on the other five emotions, which are almost always labeled as negative and undesirable, we should clarify from the outset the

grounds for this (I consider it) preconception. The first thing that springs to mind when the word *sadness* is mentioned might be the image of someone crying or you might recollect a distressing event from your past. You don't like that feeling, do you? If I mention *anger*, you might visualize an enraged person, possibly an acquaintance of yours who hurt you in some way or another because of his uncontrolled fury. Even more precisely, you could remember a time when you acted under the impetus of anger yourself and now regret that moment. You would choose to never act like that again, wouldn't you? Feeling scared might put you off as well; since we all have our immanent fears, we struggle as much as possible to give them a wide berth, so that we can avoid being seized with horror. "Disgusting" is obviously ascribed to objects with obnoxious traits, such as sliminess, stench or a taste so bad, that you want to spit it out. Certainly on the black list of emotions, right? Finally, contempt might be a bit of an elusive term. Briefly, contempt is related to disgust, just that it is directed at people and their actions, not objects. You can envisage it as the little sister of hatred, since it is a sign of our disapproval and rejection of somebody. Contempt seems to shatter the balance of emotional peace and harmony as well, doesn't it?

Therefore, taking the foregoing points into consideration, can we conclude that it is solely happiness that we should be pursuing throughout our lives, while trying to get rid of all the other emotions?

That would be totally wrong! As mentioned earlier, it is our preconceptions and lack of objectiveness that drive us into dividing our own emotions into “good” and “bad”. Our major mistake here is the failure to take a holistic approach to our feelings, in order to grasp their whole functionality and purpose, not just the immediate effects. Only by doing so will we discover that all our emotions are essential for our lives. It is the way we manage them that and whether we channel them into good or bad purposes that reveal their qualities or faults.

In this respect, let’s go over our emotions once again. Happiness, ostensibly the most desirable feeling, can actually create no end of harm. We tend to focus exclusively on ourselves, on our inner sensations when experiencing enjoyment. Thus, we become oblivious to the way others perceive our happiness. To reverse the old adage, “Somebody’s gold can be someone else’s poison”. For instance, a psychopath is keen on seeing his victims suffering. It’s his way of experiencing happiness, through inflicting pain into others. Could you possibly consider this sort of happiness a positive emotion, since it stands at the root of the victims’ torment?

Once again, it depends on which side you’re standing. For the psycho’s victims, this happiness is by no means a positive thing. On the other hand, for the slayer, it is in fact a positive one, given his fulfillment. I admit, this is a truly cruel example, but it illustrates the

need to judge emotions not just through your own eyes, but also from the standpoint of other persons involved in your actions, who might be “at the receiving end”.

A gentler case of “negative happiness” is the creation of envy. A boastful person who has just won a newsworthy prize and then goes about exposing his/her tremendous achievement can easily spark off antagonistic sentiments in those coerced to witness this showing-off. Good for you, bad for them. Positive and negative at the same time.

Sadness-provoking events are unquestionably not desirable, since the deeper the sorrow, the lower your ability to shrug it off and go on. Yet, sadness also has a bright side. If you didn't show grief for the loss of your best friend, for instance, people wouldn't know how much you cared for him. Sadness is actually a token of love for a lost person and, furthermore, it shows others that we need support in those difficult moments. Reckless persons in this kind of situations don't ever get compassion from their relatives, since they come across as thoughtless and cold-blooded.

Likewise, fear reveals that everybody has weaknesses. But for fear, we wouldn't be able to muster our energy to get out of danger's way. Although it is sometimes perceived as shameful to flinch from danger, it certainly protects us from harm. Also when dealing with danger, anger can save not only our life, but that of

others' as well. It is this rage that gathers all our strengths, so that we can pit them against our "enemies". Disgust keeps us away from poisonous and toxic substances, so feeling disgusted helps you shun them. Lastly, contempt reveals our being at odds with somebody, which is perfectly normal in democracy. Supposing our "opponent" (whether during an argument or while working as a team) spots our contempt, he might figure out that his idea is not universally approved of and might consider revising it.

All in all, you now understand why there are no completely positive or negative emotions. Next time you feel the incentive to say otherwise, try to think first of the effect your emotional reactions have not only on you, but also on the people around you.

Triggers and Responses

One universal law that governs life is that of cause and effect. According to this law, all events are the result of an anterior action and will be in their turn at the origin of another one. Emotions are no exception to this rule, so their study imply identifying their causes and outcomes (Paul Ekman names them *triggers* and *responses*, terms which I will also use henceforth).

From the outset, you need to understand that every human behavior is primarily shaped by a genetic

inheritance (naturally established, so to say). Afterwards, it is our relation to the surrounding environment that takes over the fine-tuning of our nature. Scientists usually approach this matter as the opposition between the inborn and the learnt side of our personality characteristics.

Take your temperament as an example. There are four main temperamental patterns: choleric (domineering, obstinate, ambitious, leader), melancholic (pessimistic, easily distraught, perfectionist, organized), sanguine (easily distracted, craving audience, optimistic, sprightly) and phlegmatic (lazy, untroubled, calm, sober). You did not decide which combination you wanted to be. You inherited your temperament from your parents. Yet, through education and later through self-monitoring, you can try to adjust your temperamental profile. For instance, melancholic-choleric persons will find it easier to keep in check their proneness to rage-driven actions, typical for choleric, especially since the melancholic traits give them a hand in inner-focus. What I'm saying is that we all have faults of temperament, but, at the same time, we are also endowed with the necessary tools to correct them. More about the link between temperaments and emotions later in this chapter.

Back to emotions. As mentioned earlier, all emotions are *triggered* by a specific impetus, and we *respond* in a certain way. What you should bear in mind

is that all men around the world react to the same triggers for all the seven main emotions; hence the name *universal triggers*. In the upcoming chapters I will expand upon this aspect, for each emotion in turn. Likewise, universal triggers are ascribed to *universal responses*, that is, we all respond the same way to the same trigger. For instance, everybody is overwhelmed with grief when their parents pass away. Their demise represents the universal trigger for sadness, while crying, feeling down in the dumps, withdrawing from the others for some time and staying by yourself, along with your sorrow, and the display of a sad face are part of the universal response to upsetting situations.

In connection to this, you need now to understand that the universality of emotional triggers and responses is modified, up to an extent, by some peculiarities in each individual. This means that while we are all subject to the same universal triggers and respond, generally speaking, the same way, we do have some uniquely personal ways of displaying our emotions. This uniqueness issues from how each of us interprets the content of the universal trigger and how we interpret the universal response patterns.

Let's think about fear. In large part, fear is triggered by something menacing your physical integrity, something that seems dangerous and on the verge of inflicting harm. Everyone gets scared by anything that fits this description, but it depends on each

individual what constitutes a menace for him. I, for example, am afraid of big dogs. Especially when they bark at me, they scare the wits out of me. On the other hand, I have no fear of heights. Conversely, my mother loves dogs (whatever their size), but is afraid of high buildings. This is just a minor example of how our understanding of fear differs, so that we have distinct and unique *particular triggers* for fear, even though the triggered emotion – fear – is the same. In both cases, we experience fear towards a supposedly life-threatening situation/object (universal trigger), just that for me, it is dogs that pose this threat, in contrast to heights, for mom (particular/individual triggers).

Obviously, if universal triggers have particular ones subordinated to them, universal responses are also comprised of individual reactions to these triggers. Consider again fear. On the whole, there is a domineering commonality concerning everybody's reply to frightening situations: our bodies release more dopamine and we become aware of the danger and ready for flight, while our emotion becomes visible on our faces (more on facial expressions in the sections describing comprehensively each emotion). Within this universal response for fear, each of us has his own way of dealing with the situation at hand (particular/individual response). Let's take the fear of spiders (pretty endemic, actually) as an example. Coming across a spider, one might express fear by taking a few steps back or even run away flustered.

Another might scream and jump back. A third one could channel his fear against the eight-legged creature and try to squeeze it. At its worst, fear can paralyze us, keep us motionless or even make us faint. Different people, different reactions.

The uniqueness of what makes us react emotionally and the types of these reactions is chiefly embedded into our life experiences that continually shape our personality and define who we are.

Display Rules

Having brought into the limelight the particularities of our individual emotional output, we are now going to take a closer look at what sets entire cultures apart in this respect.

While studying emotions, Paul Ekman analyzed the differences between cultures worldwide in terms of emotional expression management. He identified what he calls “display rules”, which each person within a larger or smaller community internalizes and learns to follow on any occasion of social interaction. Usually, it is our family that drum these rules into us, by repeatedly telling us how to and how not to behave in public. We thus end up learning to *modulate* our feelings, by adjusting their intensity or *falsify* them, by simulating, neutralizing or masking them.

One illustrative comparison drawn by Ekman is between Americans and Japanese:

„ [...] I tested this formulation in a series of studies that showed that when *alone* Japanese and Americans displayed the same facial expressions in response to seeing films of surgery and accidents, but when a scientist sat with them as they watched the films, the Japanese more than the Americans masked negative expressions with a smile. In private, innate expressions; in public, managed expressions. [...]”¹

People learn to keep their emotions in check first within the framework of their families. More often than not, children are taught, for example, to smile whenever a relative comes into their house. This is how the so-called “social smile” enters into our subconscious and we display it whenever the circumstances call for it, although we might not genuinely feel the need for it.

Another conclusive example is how the contestants that have reached the final stage of a beauty contest keep their emotions at bay. After the winner is announced, the loser restrains from immediately wiping away the smile she was displaying while waiting for the final decision and forces herself to hold it a little longer. This is what is called a *simulated smile*, since by no means does she really feel happy in those moments, but she needs to send the viewers the message that she can

handle her dismal failure. She might also feel envious of her glorious opponent, but revealing this resentment would not play well on cameras.

On the other hand, the winner also has to be careful with her “emotional wildfire” (term coined by Ekman), unless she wants to come across as condescending or even sneering while looking down on the one she has just got the better of. So the first thing the winner does when hearing she won the title is burst into tears. This happiness mixed with sorrowful crying is intended to send an underlying message: “I appreciate the honor I’ve been granted and I humbly accept it. My opponent might have well been in my place now.” Certainly, behind this message, her true thoughts could be: “Of course I won! I mean, just look at me. Aren’t I by far the prettiest one around here? Poor girl (referring to the second place), how on earth could she have expected to beat me with that leathery skin and swollen lips!”

There are also some predefined rules in terms of gender. Boys are often taught that men must not cry in public, whatever happens. They have to maintain an awe-inspiring front and withhold their tears, regardless of what is gnawing at them and how bad it is. Weeping over your grievance is considered a sign of weakness, which men wouldn’t want to be labeled with. Girls, on the other hand, are usually told that it is inappropriate for

a woman to show her anger in front of others, since violence and femininity simply don't go with each other.

Emotional Management

As I have stated earlier, emotions can both save and ruin our life. You already know that an emotional response is launched by a specific trigger. But what makes us react emotionally, in a spontaneous manner and how can we control these reactions?

The answer is *the automatic appraisers*. Paul Ekman and his research team have discovered that humans, as well as animals, are all endowed with a sort of automatic mechanism that helps us to quickly evaluate a given event and respond accordingly. With animals, we usually name it *instinct*, for humans, we prefer the term *reflexes*. Whatever its name, it is thanks to this response system that we are able to make instant decisions, that can sometimes avoid fatal accidents.

Suppose you're in the middle of a crucial three-hour exam. You have paid no attention to the allotted time and it is only now that you notice it drawing to an end. You still have plenty to write down, because you haven't organized your work wisely enough from the outset and now you're running out of time. Aware of the stakes (e.g. failing this exam might mean not being accepted at the desired university), you begin to feel

fear. Consequently, you start to write faster and pour out ideas that fill your head. Eventually, you the test just in time – a narrow escape.

Had it not been for the automatic appraising system, you couldn't have mustered all your energy to get done with your task. The glance you cast at the watch, when you realized how much you had lingered over your paper and that there was a good chance of not covering all the subjects, was the trigger for fear. Universally, fear is triggered by a danger to us. In this case, the danger was failing the exam. Having evaluated the trouble you got yourself into, the automatic appraisers called forth a prompt reaction. Your body released more dopamine and adrenalin, raising your stress level. This is why stress isn't always bad for you, because it helps you to come to grips with extreme situations.

Stress prepares your body for a “fight-or-flight” situation. The fighting response is normally associated with events that anger or enrage you and which are, therefore, triggers for the expression of anger. As the possibility of not passing an exam is rather a trigger for fear, the universal response would naturally be to run away from the impending threat. Since literally slipping out of the exam class would be kind of awkward, you chose to run figuratively, more rapidly and with more concentration. Every word you write means a step

farther from the danger of failing the exam. It's as if you ran with your pen, instead of on your feet.

However, the automatic appraisers can prompt you to react in a very undesirable way every now and again. Anger, for instance is often triggered by the appearance of a roadblock between you and your goal. Suppose your wife has a fixed schedule at work and she can get back home by after-noon, in due time to cook lunch for you both. But on this particular day, something unexpected happened at her office and she is held up longer than normally. Lost in her problems, she completely forgets to phone and warn you of her delay. When you return home and figure out that there's no food left in the fridge and you need to cook something on the spur of the moment all by yourself (considering you're rather helpless in the kitchen, except for eating), losing thus some of your precious time, you go off the deep end. When she finally arrives, your spouse becomes the victim of your anger.

Let's analyze what happened. Your plan for that day might have been as follows: drive back home from the office, eat quickly and then spend the rest of the day completing some work you had taken home, in order to finish everything in time for the football match of that evening. Since your wife didn't make it back home in time to get lunch ready, the fact that you need to cook yourself becomes an obstacle between you and your goal (finishing work by the start of the match). You can't sit

at your desk starving; you have just called your wife and found out she would be pretty late, so waiting for her is out of the question. You eventually decide to put on your chef-bonnet and put together a meal. While peeling the potatoes, you are already thinking of the chain reaction you got stuck in: waste time cooking, food not tasty enough, work not accomplished by evening, miss the first half...Therefore, when your wife (the trigger of your anger) steps through the door, you burst out with angry accusations.

The outcome is easily imagined: you two hurl harsh words at each other (“You should’ve let me know you would be late! But you always forget things!”, “You never appreciate all I do for you!” and so on), she gets mad at you and refuses to talk to you for the rest of the evening and your favorite team loses the match by a goal scored in the last seconds. Was all that anger really worth it?

This is a powerful case for the argument that shutting down our automatic appraisers would have been to our benefit. This isn’t possible, though. Consequently, we need to learn to be in command of our emotions in order not to let them spin out of our control. To accomplish this, you first of all have to acknowledge that there is no way you will ever get rid of your emotional impulses completely. They will always dwell within you, just that it is up to you whether you allow them to express themselves outright. Even the Buddhist

monks, after years of training both their minds and bodies, are only able to have power over the exterior display of their emotions, while the immanent flame continues to glow within them. In fact, it is a good thing we cannot fully switch off our “emotional controlling board”, otherwise we wouldn’t be able to react promptly enough to extreme situations.

On account of this, the ability we have to develop is entering into the *reflective state*, as soon as we realize that we are on the point of acting thoughtlessly, because of our appraisers’ over-objective judgment. The reflective state implies making a second appraisal yourself over the situation that is provoking a reaction. This second appraisal is done after the automatic appraisers have done their job and come up with a solution (the emotional reaction). By thinking about what you are bound to do next, you can decide whether it is a good idea to allow your emotions to run loose or, on the contrary, to hold them back.

In the anterior example, if the person who had a dispute with his wife had taken a few seconds to “step back” and reason out of the box, that is objectively, he would have discovered that anger was of no benefit to him at that moment. She, the trigger, was not a real threat that would require an anger-driven action. His fury would then have dwindled down to the point where it couldn’t overtake his judgment anymore.

Mastering self-reflection is an art. It necessitates a lot of practice, in order to internalize it and keep it handy. Some might find it easier to gain control of themselves when on the edge of bursting out emotionally, while others need much more time and patience to train. Chiefly, this depends on our temperamental profile, which I will be treating later.

Which are the steps to becoming proficient at emotional management? According to Paul Ekman, there are three of them:

- 1. Identify the triggers of your emotions*
- 2. Pay close attention and recognize the signs of an escalating emotional reaction*
- 3. Subsequent analysis, in case of failing to withhold your impulse*

Let's take these stages one by one and explain them thoroughly.

Identifying what particular triggers you have for your emotions is the easiest part. You just have to sit down and think about what makes you react emotionally. You can use a piece of paper and a pencil. Draw a grid with three columns and eight rows. The first column is allotted to the seven universal emotions. In the second one, you will be jotting down your triggers for each emotion. Finally, leave the last column for any other observations you might want to make on different triggers (e.g. their intensity [how easily they turn on

your emotion], the reactions they cause [your particular responses to your particular triggers], the frequency of that trigger throughout a normal day etc). Chances are, you won't be able to outline the whole picture of your emotional profile, because there might be some triggers you're not even aware of. So whenever you notice something that has stirred an emotion with you, come back to your grid and put it down. Acknowledging the causes of a problem is always the first step to solving it.

The second part is obviously more challenging. After having prepared theoretically to deal with your emotions, it is now time to actually face up to them. Now that you have clearly defined your triggers, you set off with an enormous advantage in your struggle to avoid surrendering to emotional outbursts, because they're not going to take you by surprise anymore. When they're on the point of taking over, you'll be able to defend yourself.

The secret lies entirely in your attentiveness to the feelings emerging within you, once a trigger has popped up. Suppose you are annoyed by people who don't understand what you tell them and you have to repeat or give further explanations. The moment the other person asks "sorry, what have you said?", the bell rings and you already know that you have in front of you a trigger for anger. Simply by recognizing the trigger you can prevent your emotions to spill out. However, if the trigger increases in intensity and begins to drive you

mad (“For the fourth time, please repeat. I wasn’t really listening”), you urgently need to give the moment a quick rational review. By thinking about the given situation, you look at the reasons why you’re on the verge of reacting emotionally and decide whether or not it is worthwhile.

In our example you might think: “What lack of respect! How dare you not listen to what I have to say! I’m gonna give you a piece of my mind, maybe you’ll listen to that!” These black unfiltered thoughts would doubtlessly lead to an angry reaction, which you might regret later. But since you are aware of your anger triggers, have classified your friend’s inattentiveness as one, and feel your growing urge to give him a proper talking-to, you will try to calm yourself by considering what undesired consequences might come afterwards: “Maybe I’m just being boring again. I mean, who’s in fact as mad about rugby discussions as me? It’s not such a big deal, let’s not make a fuss about it.” This process, by which you take a step back, “out of yourself” and analyze the situation for a few seconds, is called *self-reflection*. It’s the kernel of step no.2 to managing your emotions: paying close attention to the triggers and your likely response.

Consider another example, one cited from Paul Ekman's own experience:

„[...] Let's consider how this operates by examining another example, one from my own life. My wife, Mary Ann, was away for four days attending a conference in Washington, D.C. We both follow the practice, when away, of calling the other each day. On our Friday night call I told her that on Saturday I would be having dinner with a colleague and then working with him late into the evening. By the time I expected to reach home, at about eleven o'clock at night, it would be two in the morning for her in Washington and she would already be asleep. Since we would not be able to talk Saturday night, she said she would call me in the morning on Sunday.

Mary Ann knows that I get up early, even on a Sunday, and when she is not home I am always sitting at my computer by eight in the morning. By nine she had not called and I began to worry. It was noon her time; why hadn't she called? By ten I started to become angry. It was one in the afternoon her time, and surely she could have called. Why hadn't she? Was she embarrassed about something

she had done the night before that she didn't want to reveal? I didn't like having such thoughts, and that added to my anger. If she had called I would not have started to become vulnerable to jealousy. Might she be sick; had she been in a car accident? I began to feel afraid. Should I call the Washington, D.C., police? Probably she had just forgotten, or was so engaged in the museums she was seeing— she had told me that was what she would do on Sunday—that she had forgotten our telephone appointment. Her thoughtlessness made me angry again, supplanting my fear, as I began to think about her enjoying herself while I was worrying about her. Why should I be vulnerable to jealousy? Why didn't she call! [...]'²

In this case, Ekman acknowledges he let himself carried away by the *emotional wildfire* and failed to keep his feet on the ground. Why is it so hard sometimes to refrain from giving vent to our impulses?

There are many reasons, but most of the guilt lies with the so-called *refractory period*. This is when we are seized with a strong emotion and we have access to no other thoughts and emotions, but those that resemble and can spark up the present ones. For instance, when Ekman started to feel angry and scared because of his

wife's forgetfulness, his memory brought to the front his past experiences when he felt the same way. Since our memory works on the association principle, the given event (no phoning back) was immediately attached to a set of other events, stored in his mind as anger-and-fear-provoking, with his wife at their root. In such moments, it is quite hard to think about any other things that might diminish your fretting. The more you think about similar situations in the past, the harder it gets to quench *the emotional wildfire*.

If, in the end, you realize you're losing sway over your emotions and they're about to erupt, it is highly advisable to shift your thoughts towards another event, object or person, so that you can change your emotional state. Usually, you would want to turn it into happiness, with an input of joy-releasing thoughts. Therefore, if the aforementioned person who was on the verge of coming down on his wife for being late, had put his rage on the backburner and tried to recall some happy moments shared with her, the chance of behaving so resentfully would have decreased dramatically. A mere happy thought, such as: "Well, it was not her fault. I should actually compliment her more on her exquisite cooking skills," might just be enough.

Conversely, some other times, anger could be a good replacement for, let's say, gripping fear. Suppose you have just learned of a possible threat at your work place (your boss has announced there will be some lay-

offs in the following months). Normally, this is a trigger for fear (the danger of losing your financial security). Letting yourself be overcome by it is certainly not a wise move. A better plan would be to *reflect* on your status-quo and see if there are any lapses in your performances that might give your superior second thoughts as to whether keep you or not. In this respect, a drop of anger is just what you need to gather all your strengths and motivate yourself to stay on the right track, so as not to be worried about your immediate future at work.

However, there is never going to be any growth in your personal development, unless you're ready to accept the idea of failing from time to time. It is how we manage to pick ourselves up again after a fall that determines whether or not we will improve and grow. Thus, we arrive at the third point of reference on our emotional management plan: *the subsequent analysis*. Never underestimate its advantages. The simple fact of having let loose our destructive emotions provides us with a host of precious information regarding our emotional profile:

- details about our triggers (the clearer their image in your head, the better your chances of recognizing them next time you experience them) e.g. the previously stated guy will know henceforth that whenever his wife (or anybody else interfering with his schedule) is late for lunch, his anger is prone to be triggered

- different manners of responding to triggers (e.g. he should now be aware of his way of expressing anger when likely to miss a match: grumpiness, insults etc)
- the consequences of our reactions (e.g. the sorrow he is filled with after having reprehended his spouse makes him want to try harder the next time to withhold his anger and so avoid feeling such regret mixed with guilt again)

Briefly, don't be too self-deprecating after such a failure, but stay cool and minutely observe the foregoing points. If you did draw up a grid as I advised you earlier, it would be a good idea to review it and add any necessary notes.

To summarize: the main paths of accessing our emotions are *the automatic appraising mechanisms* and *the reflective appraisal*. The latter has rather been described as a tool for restraining our feelings. But since its outcome is not always the neutralization of the emotion, but may lead to the launching of a replacement emotional state, we can regard the reflective appraisal as a key to unlocking our emotions, just in a more sensible manner.

There are other methods to reach a certain emotional stage:

- *memory*: by remembering past experiences, the retrieved memories act as a trigger for the emotions connected to those events
- *imagination*: by simply imagining an emotional situation, we are likely to get galvanized by its intensity
- *empathy*: means the capacity to resonate with someone else's feelings, as if they were yours
- *facial expressions*: Ekman concluded that when we voluntarily exhibit the equivalent facial display of an emotion, we actually begin to experience it, up to a point

As a final general trait of emotions, you should also be aware of the impediments and difficulties you might encounter, while endeavoring to manage them. The upcoming factors determine how easy or hard it is for us to keep our emotions at bay:

- *distance between the universal emotional trigger and the particular one*

Formal as it may sound, the concept is actually easy to understand. You remember that each universal emotion has its universal trigger, the thing that makes us all have a certain emotional response. Within the universal trigger (Ekman also called it *universal theme*), each individual has its own particular trigger or

variation of the theme. Our variations may resemble more or less the universal theme. In other words, our personal triggers can be closer to or farther from the main theme. The closer they are, the harder it is to hold back the emotion.

Think of anger. Its universal trigger/theme is an obstacle between us and our goal. Being attacked in the middle of a street by an armed and masked guy is closer to the main anger theme than not having lunch early enough to catch the game. In the first case, it is way harder not to react violently, since the situation presents almost perfectly the universal condition for getting angry: the attacker is an obvious barrier between us and our major goal of staying alive. On the other hand, in the second case, the premise is not so strong, that we couldn't keep calm. Indeed, we have the necessary elements for triggering anger – the goal (watching the full match) and the roadblock (the meal delay caused by the wife's late arrival), but they don't tally indisputably with the basic trigger conditions. We say that this anger-inflicting event is farther from the main anger theme and, therefore, comparatively easier to control.

- *resemblance between the current event and the original situation that yielded the particular trigger (the variation)*

Previously, we talked about the link between the universal theme and the variation of that theme that we

learn during life. At this point, we will discuss the relation between the particular trigger or variation and the daily situations that can be ascribed to them. Again, the “closer” the present event is to our personal emotional trigger, the more likely that specific emotion will be released.

Back to our football fan. Since he’s a human, just like you and me, his anger will be triggered when he comes across a setback that precludes him from getting to a target. This is generally true for all humans. He, in particular, views his wife’s out-of-the-ordinary late arrival home as an event that is very likely to jeopardize his evening plans. So one could say “missing the match” is on our subject’s personal list of anger triggers. But this variation of the universal anger theme has, in its turn, other variations. Therefore, the clearer it is that a given event will deter our guy from watching his match, that means, the “closer” that event is to the particular trigger, the slimmer the chances for him to withhold his anger.

In our initial example, it was quite obvious that we was likely to miss the game or at least most of it: his wife didn’t show up in time to prepare his lunch; he was helpless at cooking, so had to wait for her; he had a lot of paperwork to do, which was going to be affected by this mishap. Consciously (or not) evaluating these factors, he realized he had a major barrier between him and his goal (watching the match).

Now consider a somewhat similar situation. Our die-hard fan is at the wheel, driving back home and going again in his mind through his plans for the rest of the day. Then, his phone rings; it's his wife. "Honey, sorry, I'm going to be late this time for lunch. I'm afraid there's nothing left in the fridge. It seems that you have to stop and grab a snack from a fast-food or something," she says. Your thoughts are: "Fast-food?! Nowhere near as delicious as her cooking... and the closest one is on the outskirts of the city... and it's rush hour... I'll get stuck in the heavy traffic... there will certainly be a never-ending queue there... so I'll have to wait a while... Oh, God! Why?!"

As you can notice, it seems that we have again all the reasons for an outburst of anger. Yet, this time, things aren't that bad. Our man is informed in time of the situation, so that he can take proper action to reduce the effects. This time, it's not obvious that he'll miss the match. He might have to eat a bit quicker and work more ardently on his papers to be ready in time for the match. But it doesn't bother him that much. His feelings might signal a beginning of anger, but he won't argue with his wife when she's back, because the emotion is easier to control. We say it is *farther from the particular trigger*.

- *how early in life the trigger has been learned*

According to Dr. Ekman's findings, the earlier in life you learn a trigger, the stronger you will stick to it.

Since childhood is such an important period for our personal development, anything we learn now endures more firmly the passage of time. Therefore, if you had abusive parents that used to beat you since your infancy, you are more likely to show fear, or anger, or sadness, or disgust (depending on the individual) whenever you witness or even take part in a similar aggressive situation as the victim.

- *initial emotional charge, when the trigger has been learned*

It actually refers to the intensity of the first impact with the trigger. If your parents not only used to give you a spanking, but also reprimanded you in front of the others, then your anger or fear towards them will be associated with a sense of worthlessness, shame and self-resentment. Thereby, it would be harder for you later in life to dwindle the power of this trigger. Remember that a strong emotion tends to retrieve memories of past events and feelings that can increase its impact. In this case, when you'll see somebody mistreating his/her child in public, you'll experience not only your primary emotional response (which, as I said, can vary depending on each individual), but also some auxiliary sensations, such as the ones pointed out above.

- *density of the experience*

The more you are exposed to a highly emotionally charged situation, the stronger the trigger

will be engendered. *Repetitio mater studiorum est*. If parents repeatedly use physical punishment toward their children, an emotional trigger is more likely to get embedded in their memory.

- *affective style*

This refers to our personality, which more or less determines how rapidly, intensely and resiliently we respond through emotions to a given situation. I've allotted a whole chapter to this particular issue.

Conclusion

By and large, this is what you should know about your emotions. I think you understand now how crucial they are for your daily life and how important it is to learn how to master them.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow charted what is still known as "Maslow's pyramid", a categorization of human's needs, arranged hierarchically. At the bottom, there are the most fundamental needs, the physiological ones (food, water, sex, breathing, sleep etc), while on the top are those that set men and animals apart from each other (self-esteem, achievement, respect from others etc). What is noteworthy is that all these needs can be at any time overshadowed by our emotions. We ignore our hunger if we are too sad over a dear

friend's loss. We resist our sexual impulses, for fear of being labeled deviant by the society. Boiling anger and contempt can make us throw out the window any guideline concerning proper conduct at work and, instead, give them a piece of our mind, although this might put our chances of being promoted into jeopardy. And I could go on like this forever.

It is essential to realize it is impossible to conceive a life that is separated from or without emotions. It's up to us whether we choose to live in peace with them and gain control over ourselves or try to suppress them and fight a losing battle.

CHAPTER 2: The Seven Universal Emotions

After our brief overview of the whole range of emotions, we are now going to take a closer look at each of the seven major emotions: **happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise and contempt**. Other secondary emotions (guilt, shame, relief, embarrassment, pride, hope, satisfaction, worry, disappointment, annoyance, scorn etc) are either combinations of these main emotions or variations thereof, in terms of intensity, trigger or response. Therefore, we'll be focusing on the universal emotions and only fleetingly mention the secondary ones.

How are we going to analyze these seven emotions? By going again through all the defining traits of each of the emotions we have highlighted in the previous chapter, and pointing out the characteristics distinguishing them from others. So here is what we're going to learn:

1. what that specific emotion is and how it helps us in our daily life
2. triggers and responses for each emotion
3. the facial expression for that particular emotion (how we look like when we are seized by that sensation)

4. managing its outburst

Happiness

Happiness is doubtlessly the most enjoyable emotion of all. Some philosophers actually claim that the sole purpose of our existence is the pursuit of happiness. What makes us feel happy? Clearly everyone has their own pleasures and passions that generate a sense of fulfillment within them. By and large, we could say that happiness is triggered by the convergence between our desires and reality. As a natural response, whenever a desire is satisfied, the so-called “reward mechanism” of our brains is activated, that is, the hormones responsible for our state of well-being are released and, as a result, we will feel happy.

But for the experience of joy, we wouldn't be able to set apart the pleasant from the unpleasant and life would be much duller. Happiness can be of many kinds, such as excitement, relief, contentment, wonder, ecstasy, amazement or gratitude. Each of them is triggered basically by the same universal trigger/theme, which is the fulfillment of our goal, just that within this main theme there are some small varieties.

For instance, the goal you need to reach for *relief* is the avoidance of a threat. Usually, the relief comes after the cessation of a sensation of fear of an impending

danger, that is, of which you were aware of beforehand. Frightening situations coming out of the blue aren't normally followed by relief when overcome, since it's this expectancy stress that results in relief. If you are waiting for the results of your exam to be listed on a bulletin board, you will be seized with relief and immediately afterwards with excitement, provided you got the desired mark. You've been under a considerable amount of pressure while on tenterhooks and perfectly aware of the possibility of failure (the impending danger), hence the conditions for experiencing relief. On the other hand, if you were startled by a masked colleague wanting to play a prank on you, you wouldn't feel relief after figuring out there was no real danger to fear. The surprise element here staves off relief, as your brain didn't have any time to evaluate the situation you were in and, therefore, couldn't prepare the relief reward for a prospective favorable outcome.

Relief can also act as a giveaway. If several suspects are being interrogated regarding the commission of a crime and you accuse the wrong person, the true culprit will instinctively heave a sigh of relief. He was aware of the danger of being caught and now that you got the wrong person, anticipates a narrow escape. That's why, in these cases, it would be advisable to look for any relief reactions among the other suspects, even though you had already placed the blame on a particular person. Relief might be expressed through a slight sigh or just a shadow of a smile.

Wonder is another subunit of happiness. It's that feeling that compels you to say 'Wow! It's unbelievable!'. The situation at hand needs to be totally unexpected, mesmerizing and baffling, in order to make you feel wonder. We can experience it during magic shows, when we can hardly believe our eyes what the performer is doing in front of us. Coincidences might also work (moving into the same block of flats where a high school friend lives, from whom you haven't heard for years).

You should be careful not to mistake wonder for *awe*, since the latter encompasses a touch of fear, which doesn't exist in the former.

Ecstasy is a very intense emotion. We feel ecstasy whenever we achieve something immensely desired. Passing a difficult exam is very likely to trigger this emotion, as well as winning a cut-throat competition, where you really had to outperform everyone else in order to reach absolute glory. It remains debatable whether sexual experiences can also lead to ecstasy or whether it is just sensory - physical pleasure. The two emotions shouldn't be confused with each other, since the latter implies physical arousal, unnecessary for the former. Perhaps you can reach a blend of both of them, provided that your love for you partner exceeds the boundaries of body contact.

It should again be stressed, that the sooner you acquire a trigger of a particular emotion, the stronger it will be throughout your life. In my childhood, I would always be delighted by the enticing scent of my mom's home-baked bread. Since then, whenever I come across such a smell, I feel happy. Needless to say that it is not the mere odor that triggers happiness, but all the memories that are attached to it: my mother, the kitchen where she taught me how to cook, the love with which she took the bread out of the oven and then sliced it later.

You can easily spot a happy person, usually just by casting a glance at his/her face: smiling or laughing, the corners of the lips pulled up and wrinkles around the eyes. Usually, you can tell when somebody is faking a smile, by observing whether these wrinkles emerge.

A French neurologist, Duchenne de Boulogne, was the first to conduct a serious study on smiles, over a century ago. He wanted to find out which muscles are activated when we smile. For this purpose, he used as subject a man who couldn't feel pain in his facial tissues, so that his facial muscles could be electrically stimulated, without him being harmed. According to Duchenne's findings, when the subject was artificially stimulated, his smile didn't look genuine. Conversely, when he was told a joke, his smile seemed to have gained more credibility. From the pictures taken of both situations, Duchenne concluded that it was the muscles

around the eyes that gave away the true nature of a smile:

"The emotion of frank joy is expressed on the face by the combined contraction of the *zygomaticus major* muscle and the *orbicularis oculi*. The first obeys the will but the second is only put in play by the sweet emotions of the soul; the . . . fake joy, the deceitful laugh, cannot provoke the contraction of this latter muscle. . . . The muscle around the eye does not obey the will; it is only brought into play by a true feeling, by an agreeable emotion. Its inertia, in smiling, unmask a false friend."³

Therefore, while the lips can be manipulated to draw a smile, it is our eyes that reveal the authenticity of our feelings. Yet, Ekman discovered a problem with this theory. He agreed with Duchenne up to a point, in that the muscles surrounding our eyes are beyond our control, but only partly. When somebody is grinning, he actually activates a part of his *orbicularis oculi*, so that wrinkles do appear in the corners of the eyes (they are also called "crow's feet"). This can be misleading. The other segment of these muscles, located between our eyebrows and our lids, remains, however, motionless in a grin. In a genuine big smile, our brows would slightly droop, as a sign of contraction of this segment, too. Therefore, when somebody exhibits just a soft smile,

without too much extension over the face, it is sufficient to watch whether wrinkles form around the eyes. This is not the case with a wider smile, when you need to scrutinize the movement of the brows.

When it comes to managing your joyful outburst, what you need to grasp is whether your reactions can in any sense harm somebody else. If you remember our discussion about the possibility of emotions being seen as either positive or negative, you know that the happiness, of one can also have a negative impact on others. If you're rejoicing in someone's misfortune and you show it, you are very likely to incur the hatred of that particular person. Therefore, under some circumstances, happiness also has to be kept away from erupting. You could achieve this by following the emotional management steps presented previously: firstly, identify those situations that make you feel this "evil happiness"; secondly, enter the reflective state (try putting yourself into that person's shoes, sympathize with him/her) and your desire to embarrass the unfortunate one will decrease; thirdly, if you fail and give vent to your thoughts, try making a subsequent run-down on your behavior (with the benefits of hindsight and the pangs of conscience, you might act more considerately next time).

A particular case of happiness that is better for you to conceal is the *duping delight* (a term coined by Paul Ekman in his reputed book *Telling Lies*). It refers to

the emotion you feel when you enjoy leading somebody down the garden path. According to Ekman's findings, duping delight usually takes the shape of a micro-expression (a fleeting sign of emotion which lasts for only a split second on your face). Learning to spot such a give-away will make you a better lie detector. But for more on this subject I strongly recommend the bibliography at the end of this book.

To give you a clearer picture of how micro-expressions work and, for now, especially in the case of duping delight, I will draw on a well-known TV-series, *Lie to Me*, starring Tim Roth in the exceptionally well performed role of Dr. Cal Lightman, an expert in lie detection and recognition of facial expressions (seriously, this series is a must-see). Right in the first episode, Lightman is interviewing a suspect, who had supposedly placed a bomb somewhere in the city. By analyzing his face and body language, he skillfully finds out where the bomb was hidden. One of the deadliest give-aways was the duping delight he showed, when Cal told him the police believed he had put the explosive material in a particular church. After hearing this, the corner of his lip went up for a fraction of a second. What Cal learnt from this was that the police were wrong. The suspect was happy because the investigators had been misled and were now going to lose time searching for the bomb in a wrong place. How he had wished to have been able to hold back his joy... But as Cal says: 'The truth is written all over our face.'

One more thing about happiness: it is one of those four emotions, along with anger, sadness, and fear, that can drive somebody into a crisis when reaching their highest peak. When you are elated, intoxicated with joy, you are seized with a very powerful sensation, which overtakes all three main components of human nature:

- body: your heart starts to pound more intensely and there's no way you can stay calm, but express yourself very conspicuously (hands waving up in the air, screaming, hopping, embracing anyone in your proximity, even weeping)
- mind: the reward system releases a massive amount of adrenalin and dopamine
- spirit: you feel an inner fulfillment and contentment, since you've achieved something extraordinary

In order to experience such a consuming emotion, the triggering event also has to be a special one. Think of football fans rising to their feet after their favorite team has made an unbelievable come-back against their 2-0 leading opponents, scored the victory goal in the very last second of the match and won the cup. That's what I call elated with joy. The same applies to the player who scored that last goal, who will invariably be overwhelmed by uncontrollable happiness.

Sadness

It's hard to believe that anyone might enjoy wallowing in sadness. We are all doing our utmost to circumvent this emotion. However, grief has a momentous function, meant to signal that we are going through a hard time. It is this emotion that strengthened our ancestral community relationships, since recognizing the suffering of our fellow creatures led to a mutual effort to calm and soothe the distraught one. Apart from this, sorrow (I'm using synonyms just to avoid repetition, although there might be some slight differences in meaning) also reveals how much we really cared for what or whom we lost (the loss of something or someone we cherished is the trigger). It proves that there had been a strongly established connection between us and the lost item or person. The deeper the distress, the stronger the connection was.

This is why, for instance, a widow, while dressed in mourning at her husband's funeral, who doesn't look too dismayed because of his death is likely to cause some raised eyebrows. Assuming she didn't take any tranquilizers, her apparent lack of grief will seem strange to you and you will ask yourself why she is not acting like any other normal wife. This will raise questions in your mind concerning her marriage: did they have a love-hate relationship, with a predisposition toward the hate part? did he treat her so badly that she now feels no distress over his death (on the contrary, she might in fact

feel that a load has been taken off her back)? did she ever really love him (she might have married him for undisclosed reasons)? was she cheating on him (she could already have a secret lover, ready to be made public a few days after the funeral)?

This and other similar questions occur to you, just because you don't see her displaying the universal response for sadness: tears, withdrawal, absent-mindedness, sad face (the corners of the mouth drawn down, her inner brows drawn up, and wrinkles across the forehead). Sometimes it is the absence, not the presence of an emotion, that tells the truth about somebody.

You might now be thinking: OK, but you said that people still react differently to the same trigger. Maybe she is suffering in her heart. Just because she isn't showing it doesn't mean she isn't sad. Or she might have been expecting his death and prepared in advance to manage her emotions.

You would be right. Indeed, as stated in the opening chapter, people do respond differently to the same emotional experience. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible not to show at least a small sign of grief on your face, because, as happens when we smile, there are muscles we cannot control voluntarily. These muscles will always be activated when we feel the corresponding emotion. It's the same with sadness. Some muscles that produce a sad expression will inevitably be activated, if

our feelings are genuine. Therefore, we should see at least a slight lift of the inner brow or the drooping of the corner of the mouth, in order to believe that the person is genuinely grieving. As for the ability to manage your emotions, I doubt very much that you will ever be able to maintain a poker face when your partner passes away. The more intense the love, the deeper the grief afterwards.

Like happiness, sadness also has a red-alert button, where its intensity energy causes a truly negative experience. What I'm talking about is *depression*. Scores and scores of people suffer from it nowadays, because they fail to keep elude the effects of excessive grief. Usually, depression follows a period of very deep distress, such as the horrible death of a beloved one or a major failure in your life (divorce, unemployment, missing a career-advancing opportunity, etc). I cannot emphasize enough how dangerous it is to immerse yourself into this all-consuming mood (we don't really classify depression as an emotion, but rather as a mood, given its duration). Remember that the stronger the feeling, the more secondary thoughts will occupy your mind and reinforce your prevailing emotion. In this type of situation, you are in dire need of outside help. Friends, family or physicians can bring you back on track before it's too late (suicide is most often chosen as the ultimate solution by people suffering from depression).

In terms of facial expression, sadness has the following traits: corners of the inner brows go up, lip corners go down, in a U-shape, the upper eyelids droop and the lower lip might be pushed up in a pout. When the sadness is very intense, our lower face may look as if we are smiling, since our lip corners are pushed up, shaping out a false smile.

Managing your blues can be a tough challenge. Whenever a distressing event arrives that affects us directly, meaning that we have lost something much cherished or craved for, we tend to get entangled in those thoughts that can feed our grief. As previously stated, there is no such thing as an isolated emotion, which can be sorted out and dealt with individually. All of them are accompanied by a sum of other emotional thoughts (memories, foresights, questions, desires) that are there to uphold the pivotal feeling. So you either take the whole gang, or you take nothing at all.

Suppose you have just been made redundant. You've got a wife and two children, one of them on the verge of leaving for university. The very instant you are given the sack (the trigger for sadness), you might at first feel something else than unhappiness. You could be angry with your boss for not having appreciated you for the great work you have done. Anger might as well come along with a deeply felt contempt for your boss, since you consider yourself better qualified and more competent than your superior thinks of you. You could

be disgusted at this injustice and feel sick about the whole reprehensible system. Anyway, chances are that after things have settled a bit, you will begin to feel sad. What follows is easy to imagine. You get anxious about the future and start asking yourself how you and your family are going to keep body and soul together. You'll have doubts about yourself: what if you actually were a poor employee, who deserved to be dismissed? You recall those harsh moments in your life, when you had to eke out a living, earning very little money.

Once again, it is the reflective state that can help us break the deadlock. The usually first step in our emotional management plan, identifying your triggers, could be skipped in this case, provided your dismissal took you aback and you haven't dealt with a similar situation before. The second step, entering the reflective state, is, conversely, of even bigger importance, given the size of your problem. You need to focus on your strengths, those abilities that you can use as effectively in another field of activity. This could actually be your chance to try something new. Weren't you a little tired out with the same commonplace tasks you had to accomplish daily? With you experience, skills and motivation, it's unlikely that you are going to stay out of work for too long.

Bear in mind that there is no perfectly clear road; you will always encounter roadblocks. But with each setback, you become stronger, because it's what we

learn from our mistakes that makes us wiser. Paulo Coelho said that those who have never been defeated will never win.

Fear

Although it might sometimes be thought of as something to be ashamed of, fear has been a life-saving tool for our ancestors, because it allowed them to determine whether they could match their strengths with a predator or not. When they felt fear, they knew that they would put themselves at high risk by standing in the beast's way.

Fear is generally activated by an impending threat (leading to a so-called "expectancy fear") or a dangerous situation in which we suddenly find ourselves. The inherently embedded message of fear is "Run for your life!" or, on the contrary, it may immobilize us: "Don't move a muscle!" Hence the two universal responses for fear: flight or freeze.

According to the seriousness of the source of fear (how much it scares you), you might not always react by following the impulse to run. Sometimes you are transfixed and become motionless. Why is that? Because nature has taught us that under specific circumstances, it's better to remain silent and stand still in order not to

draw the predator's attention to ourselves, hoping that the danger will pass. If you watch cats, when they notice your unexpected appearance, they first freeze and stare at you. Then, if they decide that you do pose a threat to them, they dash away. An extreme manifestation in humans of freezing with fright is fainting. Our brain partially shuts down, because it sees the situation as impossible to overcome.

Life devoid of fear would be dreadful. Imagine you weren't afraid of anything. While at the wheel, a driver coming from the opposite direction loses control of the vehicle and heads straight towards you. Overly brave as you would be, you won't turn the wheel and end up in a hapless collision. Certainly, such things don't happen in real life, because fear of death, ingrained into all living species, is linked to the reflex of turning the wheel in an attempt to avoid the accident. In this kind of case, our automatic appraisers' instant response is crucial. Yet, there is more than one side to the coin.

Anxious people are prone to make mistakes in judging a given event. In other words, they are at the mercy of the slapdash reaction of their auto-appraisers, which make much ado about nothing.

Anxiety works something like this. Suppose you were waiting for your child to come back home from school. The time when he usually shows up has passed and you have not been told that he would be late. In the

first minutes you start to worry about him and don't realize that there are a lot of possible explanations for the small delay. The clock is ticking and still no sign of him. You're getting more and more unsettled."He's almost an hour late...What could have happened to him?" you keep asking yourself. The idea of him having been held up at school because of a class project in which he is taking part does not enter your mind.

After an hour of uneasiness, you begin to panic. "What horrible danger did he get into? Has he been abducted? Is he hurt? Is he still alive?!!!" The more time you have to spend without having any clear answer to these questions, the more your fear grows, until it reaches panic level. At this moment, your mind rejects any thought that could possibly calm you down, because, as I have already said, strong emotions come in chain reactions. Therefore, your son being late reminds you of all the other past events when he didn't come home in time and you subsequently discovered that he had got into trouble.

As the minutes fly by, it gets harder to maintain a reflective state of mind. Every rational explanation you find to counter your worries loses power, because you anticipate the moment when so much time has elapsed, that you cannot compare the present event with any other past one. "He's been late before, but not that much. What could have led to this?"

Finally, when your son comes through the door, your stress level instantly drops and another emotion, sometimes equal in intensity, takes the place of fear. Usually, you would first feel a wave of relief, immediately after seeing your child safe and sound. Afterwards, you are likely to be flooded with anger or sadness or both. These subsequent emotions can have a double meaning.

You could be angry with your offspring, because he caused your panic and fear by not having informed you of being late. The more frightened you were while on tenterhooks, the more upset you are now with his thoughtlessness. This is perfectly understandable. Once the trigger for fear is gone (the prospect of your boy being in danger is threatening enough to cause fear in any parent) and you learn that he is out of any problem, the fear-triggering event turns itself into an enraging one. And your reaction reflects this change: instead of fretting and pacing the floor, you are now ready to give you kid a proper talking-to. Your son not coming home on time and not letting you know why he is held up is a trigger for anger, since you are precluded from reaching your goal (to always know where your son is and what he is doing).

A second explanation for your anger is that you are actually crossed with yourself, for having made such a fuss for nothing. Besides, your son is a teenager now; he needs some independence and wants to be assured

that you are ready to put your whole trust in him. Discovering that you have been so concerned about him will make him accuse you of overreacting. That's why you get angry with yourself: you are aware of your own misconduct and overreaction and you might regard yourself as a coward or silly person. This is what psychologists call *reacting emotionally towards your own emotions*.

As for the posterior sadness you might feel, this is also a two-way street. On the one hand, your sadness could be caused by the different scenarios you construct in your head, that could have been an alternative to the happy end, in which you boy comes back in one piece. You should remember that the mere thought of an emotionally intense event has the capacity to stir up the corresponding emotion. All these scenarios begin with "But what if you he had... and didn't return?!" I think you recognize the pattern, don't you? These thoughts are conducive to only one conclusion: the loss of your son and, yes, you are right, the loss of a dear person is the universal trigger for sadness.

On the other hand, you can direct your distress against yourself, thinking of yourself that you were not able to prove courage and undaunted hope in a difficult situation. If you acted this way because of such a petty thing, what are you going to do when your beloved ones will truly be in danger and in genuine need of your help?

In other words, your sadness is activated by the loss of self-confidence.

At its most extreme point, fear causes panic attacks that can lead to fainting or hypertension in the long run. There are also cases when people have literally died of fear.

The worst happens when the fear trigger appears instantly, without any prior notice. There's hardly anything that we can do to hold off our reaction. Absent-mindedness is most often why we can't avoid getting scared by something coming out of the blue. Its opposite, mindfulness, would be the solution to this problem. This means that we have to keep focused on "here and now". In other words, whenever our thoughts tend to wander away, we should bring them back and channel them into what we are doing at the present time. You can exercise mindfulness irrespectively of the time of the day or you occupation. If you're eating your meal, then think of nothing else but your food: the plating, smell, taste. Try to soak up all that deliciousness. If you're listening to music, then listen carefully. Don't try learning or working on something too demanding while listening to music. Some say it boosts your concentration, but it actually diverts your attention from the task at hand. The "Mozart Effect" will only work if you devote your full attention to music for a few moments.

Incidentally, there is an old Indian adage that refers to the importance of mindfulness. Once, a wise man was asked by his apprentices, what they should do in order to reach his level of wisdom. He responded: "Nothing is simpler. When you sit, sit. When you go, go. When you arrive, arrive." Baffled by his answer, the trainees replied they were already doing this every day. Smiling, he corrected them: "On the contrary. While sitting, you're already going. While going, you're already arriving. While arriving, you're already sitting."

As for the other type of fear (expectancy fear), you should follow the same guidelines for emotional management: single out your triggers and then, with the benefits of mindfulness, you'll be able to efficiently deal with them when you have to. Very important to mention is that you should expose yourself as often as possible to these triggers. Although this emotion clearly encourages us to keep a wide berth from the source of fear, by overstepping this inner bias we get to grips with our fears and, eventually, overcome them. We can't run from our fears all our lives. Sooner or later, we have to pluck up courage and face them. This is what the treatment of phobias consists of: confronting the patients with the origin of their fears and anxieties.

The facial expression for fear can be easily mistaken for sadness, even though there are differences between them. With fear, the brows are fully raised and drawn together, while the grieving brows only lift their

inner corners. The upper eyelid is raised, while the lower one is tensed when experiencing fear. Sad eyes have a lost gaze and are slightly covered by the *orbicularis oculi* in their upper exterior part, as if by a triangle. Lastly, lip corners are drawn back with scared individuals, in contrast to the drooping ones of a distraught man.

Sometimes, we can witness a blend of these two emotions, in which case our face will display a combination of both emotions' signs.

Anger

Anger is by far the most dynamic, forceful emotion, triggered by an obstruction between us and our goal. Its aim is to channel all our strengths into removing that particular roadblock, so that we can continue pursuing our objective.

People usually regard rage as an undesirable state of mind. I'm sure you have also gone through at least one bad experience when you let yourself drifted away by your fury and later, when you have calmed down, regretted your conduct. Again, you reacted emotionally (with regret) concerning your previous emotional behavior (anger). No one likes people with a hot temper. You simply cannot predict when they are going to fly off the handle again. Unlike the others emotions, anger can

be most harmful for those around us when it gets out of hand. And because it is the most destructive, it also takes a lot more effort to keep it in check.

Some claim that our anger and impetus to violence are remnants of the savage nature we inherited from our ancestors. But before jumping to conclusions, let's look at the brighter side as well. Suppose our ancestors had not been endowed with this emotion. They would have remained calm and undisturbed when confronted with a predator and very likely gotten eaten up.

It is these extreme situations that activate the "fight or flight" instinct. Assuming there were no hiding places and they were forced into a confrontation, our forefathers would have had to rule out the option of running. So they had to stay and fight. But for anger, they could not direct all their energy against the enemy and launch an attack.

Under these circumstances, anger can virtually be a life saver. Obviously, we are rather unlikely to be exposed to this sort of cliff-hanger nowadays. But remember the example I gave in the introduction, the one with the armed attacker. Indeed, a fear-induced attempt to flee might seem more sensible, especially if the thief is armed. But if he manages to pounce on you, you must respond properly, in order to put yourself and your goods at safe. Even the Dalai Lama acknowledges

the need for violent action in this kind of situations. Moreover, no outburst meant to protect your own physical safety (or that of another person) is objected to by the public. On the contrary, most of us actually adhere to such behavior. Would you feel pity for a rapist who is killed by one of his innocent victims during an assault? Or would you be sorry for having hurt the man who was trying to steal your wife's purse? I don't think so.

Use it wisely and anger can be your best friend. It is not only an excellent defense tool. It also provides you with the required amount of energy in order to undertake a challenging task. When kept in check, anger is like flame burning inside us that provides the motivation for carrying out our mission. The most convincing examples come from sports. Whenever it seems that the odds are against you and you seem to be out of the running, it is anger that takes us by the hand and gives us a boost of confidence and self-confidence. When the team you are playing against is leading,, letting yourself be overcome by fear or sadness at the prospect of losing would do nothing more than remove you even farther from your objective.

In cases like this, an adapted form of our emotional management strategy would be very helpful. While the first step is still needed (acknowledging your emotional status and finding arguments against you feeling that particular emotion), your second step should

be trying to find a substitute for your emotions in order to successfully deal with the problem. To put it another way, you will have to engender a new emotional response, so that you can eradicate the initial trigger.

To further illustrate my point, I will go back to my sports example. So you and your team are losing the match (whatever it may be: football, handball, basketball, etc). The clock is ticking and time is running to your opponents' advantage. You feel downcast and resigned to the expected result. "Damn! We could have won! If only...Too late now, we've been beaten There's no way we can change the score anymore..." Thoughts like these are characteristic of fear mixed with sadness, which are perfectly normal when you experience the stress of losing a match that you thought you would win. Yet, hope is the last that should die.

In order to regain your position and come back in the game, you first need to get rid of the emotions that hold you back from acting sensibly. By entering the reflective state, you will realize that there is no need to be scared or sad. Fear is of no use because you have nowhere to run or hide (imagine how that would look on a football field). And there is no reason for sadness because you haven't lost anything yet. Stop worrying about what could happen when the whistle signals the end of the match and start thinking of what you can still do now in order to prevent the loss. Stop creating frightening and distressing images in your head of how

you are going to look like, lying on the grass while the other team is celebrating their victory. Instead, start planning your next offensive move.

After having ridden of our fear and distress, we must not remain neutral in terms of emotions. We must replace fear and sadness with that particular emotion that can help us move forward and change the tide in our direction. That emotion is certainly anger. Under such circumstances, anger will energize us and give us power to fight back (I'm not talking literally here. I'm not urging you to commit more fouls because you're angry. You still have to act within the limits of fair play). Your anger should be focused not on the persons you are playing against, who may very well be a good friend off the field, but against the situation as a whole.

Being below your opponent on the score board was a trigger for fear and sadness. It is up to you to transform it into an anger trigger and act accordingly. How do you think all the come-backs in sports happen? By resigning yourself to your apparently inevitable defeat? No way. Look at what a professional handball coach is usually telling his team to do at time-out breaks, when their game seems rather slipshod or careless. He is capitalizing on their anger resources, by clarifying what their objective is (winning) and who the roadblock is (the other team). Since anger is the only emotion capable of helping his players remove that hindrance, it goes

without saying that a good trainer will inevitably rely on it.

Now that we've seen how anger can be managed in order to direct its energy towards reaching our goal, we must necessarily consider those cases where you ought to neutralize your anger since it is of no benefit to give in to it.

Controlling one's fury is perhaps the greatest challenge in one's quest to reach self-control. There is no other emotion as powerful as anger, hence the difficulty in restraining it. There are countless books entirely devoted to the subject of anger management, and even special self-help courses designed to teach their members how to say NO to their violent impulses. Again, our emotional management plan would be highly effective with anger, too. The problem is that you should get used to the idea that there will always be ups and downs in your struggle to control your anger. Expect a series of failures at the beginning, unless you are Buddhist monk, who has trained his mind and body for at least ten years and is now impervious to any provocation. In contrast to the other emotions, anger will need a more careful treatment, meaning that you will have to work more on the third step of our management plan, which is the subsequent analysis. Every time you have reacted under the influence of your anger, lose no time analyzing your behavior and carefully look into your triggers and responses.

Society itself is prompting us to conduct ourselves more aggressively and thoughtlessly in our relations with our fellow creatures. We are living in a time of cut-throat, savage competition, where everybody tries to reach the top because, admittedly, the one on top takes it all. There is no place for the faint-hearted and error-prone anymore. You're either at the top or at the bottom. The middle layer is becoming smaller and smaller. We are part of the rat race from our very first school day. Teachers reward or punish students with their status-granting marks. Getting a lower mark means getting cross with, or even angry at, your colleagues with higher marks, with your "unfair" teacher, and with your demanding parents.

This ordeal continues throughout your education and is not reduced but increased when you enter the labor market. Things heat up here. If you fail to impress your employer, you might be out of work. If you fail to reach a certain benchmark, you get no promotion. If your work is unsatisfactory, your salary won't be increased. With each of these drops, the goblet of anger gets closer to overflowing.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to curb your anger impulse. If people would develop an awareness of this fact and actually do something to gain control over their own instincts, crime rates would dramatically decrease. Having a fit of rage can be very dangerous not only for your victim, but for you, too.

You might get seriously hurt when you get involved in a heated dispute. Moreover, you risk making yourself look silly or contemptible in front of your acquaintances, who are going to see the less pleasant side of your personality. Nobody likes being around impulsive persons, so think twice before you decide to release all that anger harbored within you. Your target might lose a tooth, but you will lose a lot more, morally and, sometimes, legally speaking.

With regard to facial expression, anger can be easily identified: the brows are lowered and drawn together, the lips are either pressed firmly together with the lips straight or down or open, tensed in a square shape as if shouting, the eyes have a piercing gaze and the nostrils might flare. The expression of anger is comparatively difficult to hide. It is most often accompanied by a rise in the pitch of our voice (the more intense our anger, the higher the pitch, up to the level of crying out) and certain gestures, such as clenching the fist, raising the head, bringing the chest forward.

Another sign of rage is that the temperature of our hands rises. When our ancestors were preparing for attack, the blood flow to their arms, the instruments of attack, would increase. The opposite occurs when we need to flee, then the blood flow to our legs increases.

Disgust

This emotion expresses the strong desire to repel the source of the revulsion. We are by nature endowed with this defense system called “disgust” so as to avoid poisonous substances. Their smell, color, taste, and shape warn our organism that the particular animal or plant might pose a threat to our health, therefore it discourages us from consuming it. Thus, our ancestors managed in their day to distinguish edible from toxic food sources.

Surely, you can imagine that in our present society, disgust is not exclusively linked to obnoxious substances anymore. Throughout the ages, humanity has evolved up to a point where it can place values on more abstract objects and events as well. That’s why all our emotions are now triggered by a wider range of things than in our remote past.

As a result,, disgust is also aimed nowadays at people we find repugnant. Whenever somebody makes a repulsive gesture ,such as spitting or noisily blowing their nose (then looking in their handkerchief to check the color) in front of us, we react in a way that shows our disapproval. This is so because our brain automatically labels them as illness-causing objects.

Moreover, conduct that we do not approve of, or that we may find preposterous, can cause us to feel disgust. For instance, there is nothing wrong to show

anger towards our spouse when having an argument (obviously, by this I refer to that kind of innocuous controlled anger, something more like sulkiness, rather than uncontrolled fury which is out of the question). This merely proves that we do not share the same opinions as to what is appropriate behavior or what should be done to reach a certain goal or complete a task. This may lead to some disagreements and discomfort in our interaction until one of us gives in. On the other hand, if our partner shows disgust when talking with us and we ascertain that it is directed at us personally, then it is highly likely that our marriage is drawing to an end. Are you going to accept being seen as a repugnant object in his/her life? Just think a bit about your position: you've just won a high place on your partner's list of disgust triggers, along with rotten eggs, dung, vomiting or eating raw lemons (already have that sour taste in your mouth, don't you?).

When it comes to managing your disgust incentive, there is not so much to say, since there is hardly any reason why you would want to hold it back. An exception might be appropriate where your interaction with the other person requires politeness. When you're in a conversation with somebody, be it formal or more like a chit-chat and your counterpart brings up a disgusting subject for you, but pleasurable for him, you might want to withhold your reactions, in order not to offend him. Don't forget that each individual has specific variations on the universal

emotional themes. So what's disgusting for you might have no such effect on somebody else or it may even be to his taste. Someone's meat is someone else's poison. Some people, although they love chemistry and biology, don't get into medicine, because they simply can't stand the sight of blood.

What's interesting about this emotion is that we have no problem to deactivate it, provided the source of disgust is also a source for another more intensely felt emotion. For instance, the idea of changing diapers is doubtlessly disgusting, but if the child we have to change is our offspring, then we get over that impulse and carry out our parental duties. This is because our child is above all a trigger for happiness, which suppresses the trigger for disgust.

Other examples are when having an intimate relation with somebody. Since we are in love with that person, we have no problem kissing him/her. This actually becomes a pleasurable trigger, which would certainly not be the case if we were to kiss somebody we feel no infatuation for.

Incidentally, this rule applies to all emotions. Whenever an event or an object triggers several emotions at the same time, the more powerful one usually keeps the other one in check. Large dogs are one of my triggers for fear, but I would not have a second thought about confronting them if they were to attack

my child, since the trigger for anger would be stronger than the one for fright.

In terms of facial appearance, disgust makes our nose wrinkle, our upper lip rise, with the lower one pushing it up or lowered and slightly protruding. The brow and upper lid are also lowered.

Surprise

Surprise is the most fleeting emotion, since it only lasts for about one second. We are surprised by any unexpected events that occur around us. Surprise is a neutral emotion, meaning that it only makes room for another emotion (hence its short exhibition span, immediately followed by another feeling). Therefore, when we greet somebody with the classical “What a happy surprise!”, we actually have in mind that we were first taken aback by that person’s appearance and afterwards felt happy to see them.

Everybody gets surprised by something. Whenever you hear someone expressing pride in never being taken by surprise by anything, it tells you that he is very self-aware and self-confident, but it doesn’t mean that he is immune to any surprising events.

As with all emotions, surprise is differently perceived by each individual. Some like being surprised; unexpected presents or news, thrilling films and novel

packed with plot twists are enjoyable to them. Others prefer not to be caught unawares. They don't like the unexpected and will usually get annoyed when someone tries to surprise them. So make sure you know how your friends respond to surprise triggers in order not to upset them.

The ability to get surprised is of paramount importance. Thanks to it, we can detect any out of the ordinary changes in our environment, be aware of their anticipated effects and react accordingly, in only a matter of split seconds.

Let us draw on the impending car accident example. But for our reaction under the influence of surprise, which in this case calls forth fear, we could not make use of our reflexes, in order to avoid the collision. Our surprise system is always awake and ready to signal the alarm in case of emergency. Surprise is actually at the bedrock of all our instincts. Without it we would be much slower and it would take much longer for us to adjust to the environment.

That's why I will not allot any space for advice on how to manage your surprise. There is no need for it unless you're playing poker and don't want to give any clues about what's in your cards. But since I'm not a poker player, I'll just leave you with that.

In terms of facial expressions, surprise makes us drop our jaws (depending on its intensity, open our

mouth as well), widen our eyes and raise our brows. It is quite often mistaken for fear, given some similarities in both upper and lower face expressions. Nonetheless, in fear the eyebrows are drawn together, while in surprise the eyebrows are only pulled up. In fear, one can notice the tension underneath the eyes, which does not appear when surprised. Lastly, when being scared, the corners of our mouth are stretched backwards, in contrast to the round shaped surprise mouth.

Fake surprise is usually exposed by the length of expression. Genuine surprise only lasts for one second at the most. So when you see someone's eyebrows raised up on his forehead for more than a second, it's a sure-fire sign that he is faking it. When interrogating a suspect, police could make use of this technique by revealing an object connected with the crime scene or the victim. It could be the weapon used to kill the victim, something the victim was wearing when killed or even the corpse itself. According to the suspect's reaction at this sight, police can make out whether that is the perpetrator or not: if he shows genuine surprise, chances are that somebody else is guilty, as the sight of the evidence was something new to him, something he didn't see before. Otherwise, he is getting closer to being convicted, since his lack of surprise could mean that he is familiar with those objects.

There are, however, two factors here to be taken into consideration. Firstly, police should make sure that

the pictures they are showing him had not gone viral already. In this case, anyone could have known how the victim looked like, how he was she killed, and other crime details. Consequently, even an innocent man would not show surprise when being presented with the evidence and thus be mistakenly accused of something he didn't commit.

Pretending to be surprised is a difficult task, especially when we try to present ourselves as ignorant of a particular piece of information. Suppose a suspect is being accused of having taken part in a crime and asked about his accomplice who, ostensibly, killed the victim. If our suspect asks indignantly "How was I supposed to know that he was going to shoot?" and at this moment raises his brows in surprise, we can almost certainly conclude that the opposite of his statement is true (he was aware of what was going to happen to the victim).

Under some circumstances, the opposite expression of surprise is the one suggesting concentration and physical or psychical endeavor. With this expression, the brows are lowered and have their inner corners pulled together. The eyes can also be tightened. These two different expressions (surprise and concentration) reveal whether we have any knowledge of the object presented to us. Surprise shows that we are seeing the object for the first time.

Contempt

Contempt is a bit more difficult to define. In a few words, it's a sort of disrespect towards somebody with whom we do not agree with and whose opinion we do not approve of or may even regard as offensive.

This emotion is relatively new in our history. By this I mean that it was not specific to our ancestors since their affective system was not as evolved. We feel contempt only for theoretical concepts that conflict with our own value system and convictions. Since our ancestors had no or very limited awareness of notions like self-esteem, self-worthiness or self-actualization meant, they weren't able to feel contempt. As our society developed and men began to move beyond their basic needs (food, water, sleep or shelter), they reached out to higher values and targeted specifically human goals that set them apart from animals. However, with this development emerged a new emotion: contempt.

People usually don't recognize contempt in others, because they have no idea how it looks like. In terms of facial expression, it's the single one-sided emotion. It is visible in the corner of our mouth, which we tighten when feeling contemptuous. Sometimes, contempt can merge with anger, as they have some commonalities in terms of triggers and responses.

The message of contempt is "I'm better than you. You're wrong and have no reason to counter me. You

should shut up and take my word for it.” It’s pretty rude meaning would be the only reason why you might want to hold back on expressing your contempt. If you are so lucky as to show outright your contempt on face of a knowledgeable person, who will inevitably get the message, you risk upsetting him and making him want to pay you back and prove you wrong for your misjudgment.

CHAPTER 3: Predisposition to Certain Emotions According to Temperament

To summarize our argument up to this point, let's remember that within the universal trigger for each emotion, each and every individual has his/her own variation. It's the same for our reactions to these triggers: while everybody reacts, on the whole, in a similar way, we don't follow the same path in our individual emotional responses to the same trigger. Each of you gets sad when losing something deeply cherished (universal trigger/theme). However, at the same time, each of you has a beloved person or object to miss and grieve over when they're gone (particular trigger/variation).

The death of someone's mother will almost invariably cause him the bitterest distress he has ever felt. Yet, his spouse, who has never seen eye to eye with her mother-in-law, might not feel the same level of bereavement. Why? Because the same event (the death of the mother) is simultaneously a sadness trigger for her son and a neutral one or, who knows, maybe a happiness one for her daughter-in-law. The man looks upon this event as a tragedy, since he loved his mom and cared a lot about her (on the sadness section, we talked about the relation between happiness and sadness: the warmer the anterior happiness, the colder the posterior grief). On the

other hand, his wife has little reason to mourn sincerely for his loss. Considering that his mother has always been a trigger for anger and contempt for her, she would now sooner enjoy a sense of relief, combined with the so-called *Schadensfreude* (Paul Ekman mentions it in his books; in German, it would mean “enjoyment of someone’s misfortune”).

Now that we’ve refreshed our memories with some basic facts about the mechanics of emotions, let us proceed to the theme of this chapter: how our temperament affects our emotional profile.

Although I’ve already mentioned it earlier in this book, I would still like to make you think for a while about your own temperament. First of all, do you have such a thing at all? Is it good to have it? How many types are there? How can you find out what sort of temperament you were born with? Why is it important to learn more about your own temperament and consider those of others as well? Can you change your temperamental profile? The answers to all these questions are discussed below.

One of the first lessons for a psychology student is human personality. Very briefly, our personality is comprised of three major segments. First there is the *temperament*, the dynamic-energetic side (how we approach daily problems). Then we have the *character*, referring to the relational aspect of personality (how we

interact with others). Our *aptitudes* make up the final segment, standing for the operational part (what we're good at). Whenever you want to evaluate somebody's personality, you need to look at all of these three aspects. In this section of the book, we are going to deal only with the first personality building block – the temperament – since it represents the liaison between two of the most important parts of human nature – personality and emotions.

As you can guess from the definition, the temperament is the sum of all those traits that structure our demeanor. It is the most constant and general characteristic of the human subject and, above all, it's innate. We inherit our temperamental profile from our parents and we cannot make fundamental changes to it - just, let's say, give it a few tweaks. Parents can get an idea about their children's temperament from their early infancy. Yet, we cannot conclude much until the teenage period is over and certain characteristics have become crystallized.

There is no good or bad temperament. All types have both qualities and faults. In addition to this, it does not affect our character and aptitudes. Therefore, in each temperamental type we can come across both congenial and mischievous people, talented or awkward ones.

Hippocrates and Galenus marked out the temperamental types in the 5th century BC. According

to them, there are four different profiles: choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic and sanguine. They also assigned each of them a representative time of the year and a natural element, in order to clearly depict their state of being. Sanguine people are instable as the air of spring, choleric are heated as the fire of summer, melancholics are the dreary earth of autumn, and phlegmatics are assigned the cool humidity of winter.

In the following sections, we will learn about each type of temperament, considering its defining traits and bias towards specific emotions. Prior to reading this, you should be aware that there is no such thing as *pure temperament*. This means that we all have ingrained within ourselves a combination of all the four profiles. Usually, one or two of them dominate and form the main temperamental profile. Scientifically speaking, the four types have been analyzed separately, in order to create a comprehensive image of what traits are ascribed to what temperament.

The Choleric Type

Choleric are the most powerful and courageous individuals. They are born to be leaders and cannot imagine themselves in a submissive position. They are very sociable, but not always companionable, since they usually express themselves in a very direct manner, unaware of the feelings of the others who he might hurt through their rudeness.. Obstinacy is one of the

choleric's main weak points. You can get on very well with a choleric, as long as you do as he says...NOW!

Because of their strong domineering side, they end up, more often than not, stirring up strong contempt in others. Sometimes, choleric enjoy making others look in comparison to them. That's why you might need some nerves of steel to hold on to your friendship with a pure choleric. He soaks up all the praise he can get and will usually avoid anything that might reduce some of his glory. Most choleric have very high self-esteem and some deem themselves infallible. They hate admitting their errors, as this would mean to them an act of public humiliation. Expressions such as "Forgive me" or "I'm sorry" are not included in their vocabulary.

I believe you can see where this is going. The most common emotion for a choleric person is obviously anger. But be careful not to jump to conclusions and hasten to label all choleric as savage individuals to be shunned rather than included within one's circle of friends. Remember that there is no purely positive or negative emotion. Hence the two faces of anger. It's how you make use of an emotion that turns it into a constructive or destructive tool. Let me use an example to make my point clearer.

We have Choleric A and Choleric B. The former is a very edgy person. He doesn't bear being bothered by anyone, he is rather unapproachable, cagey and easily

goes off the deep end, when things don't turn out as he had expected. Things are pretty clear here: it's because of his untamed anger that he's got such an annoying demeanor.

On the other hand, Choleric B is the intrepid type. He loves getting involved in all sorts of activities (the greater the challenge, the more engaged he is). He loves to organize people and delegate each of them the most appropriate task to carry out. He's a very assertive man and always gets his ideas through. Losing makes him stronger and motivates him further to invest even more time and passion into that activity, until the final result meets his standards.

Can you guess what the commonality and the difference between these two imaginary persons are? Surprisingly as it may sound, they are both guided by a powerful sense of anger. While Choleric A directs his anger at people, at fortune or anyone else who can be blamed for him not having achieved his goals, in contrast, Choleric B channels all his anger into the process of solving problems. His rage will grow too when encountering failure, but he doesn't turn it against the persons around him. Instead, he points it at the problem at hand, which gives him more energy and the desire to overcome it.

If I still haven't erased all your doubts, you might want to look back at the section devoted to anger. Don't

forget what the trigger for anger is: an obstacle or impediment between us and our goal. Choleric A's biggest mistake is that he doesn't identify the trigger for his anger correctly. It is not the persons surrounding him, or bad luck, or the weather, or unforeseen delays that forestall him from reaching his objective. He is the only one to be held accountable for both his success and defeat. If he would take a page out of Choleric B's book, we would know that he should rather focus his anger on the problem and his manner of dealing with it, instead of wasting all that energy in vain.

To conclude, both choleric types have the same triggers for their anger. But one of them responds more efficiently.

The Melancholic Type

One should be careful when using the word "melancholic", since it has different meanings, depending on the frame of reference. Literally, a melancholic person is dejected or depressed, suffering deeply because of a loss. We could more formally say that a melancholic is someone eclipsed by sadness. But this definition would be appropriate only for the purpose of describing the emotional state of a person at a given time. If we were to take a greater span of time, we would need more research into a person's behavior before we could label him as melancholic.

In terms of temperament, melancholics are, indeed, more easy to upset or disturb. They tend to look at the darker side of a situation and approach problems in a more pessimistic manner. They take to heart every troubling event and even the tiniest gesture that could be interpreted as negative can cause them serious pain. If you have a melancholic friend, you really have to choose your words carefully because he will always try to find their underlying meaning (even if there is no such thing) and interpret them as directed at him personally.

However, in spite of these imperfections, melancholics are the most perfection-oriented persons. They will always seek to flawlessly see a thing through, because, as they see it, if something is worth doing, then it should be done properly. They have very high standards. On the one hand, they are generally criticized for this, as most others fail to meet their demands. On the other hand, thanks to the higher benchmark they set for themselves and others, their skills are continually improving.

Emotionally speaking, melancholics are highly susceptible to sadness and fear. Yet, it is again up to them and how they manipulate this emotional energy, to make the most of these emotions.

Let's make the acquaintance of Melancholic A and Melancholic B. Suppose they are classmates and are due to take an important exam tomorrow. It is generally

thought that you are not going to be affected by the common pre-exam anxiety, as long as you have studied hard in advance. The rule doesn't apply to melancholics, however. No matter how much and how intensely they immersed themselves into the study material, they will still be seized with worries and will construct black scenarios in their head of the "What if..." type.

So we've already found a common emotion for our two characters: they are both scared before the exam. Here comes the crucial difference. Melancholic A receives no positive impulse from his *emotional wildfire*, although it is seriously affecting his energy and concentration and, thus his ability to perform on the exam day." Furthermore, instead of attempting to reduce the *fire*, Melancholic A allows it to find more fuel in his memories and thoughts similar to the present situation. He will inevitably recount some past experiences, when he failed a test, even though he had learned so much for it. He will think of himself as incapable of passing and will thus lose a great deal of self-confidence.

In contrast, Melancholic B is aware of his fright and he also knows how damaging his overanxiety can be. Therefore, he decides to enter the reflective state and deal with his emotions. After having resolved his doubts about himself and reassured himself (by recollecting past events when he came out successfully out of a challenging situation), he will now be a step ahead of his

friend, Melancholic A, who is still entangled in his worries.

When it comes to the fundamental sadness of a melancholic, B again has an advantage over A, because he is able to deploy the third stage of the emotional management strategy, that is, the subsequent analysis in case of failure. In the event B was too affected by his exaggerated fear and this prevented him from doing as well as he had hoped for on the exam, he will, at least, be able to redirect his resulting sadness towards finding, explanations and solutions for his difficulties. Thus, he might learn some relaxation techniques he can employ before the next exam, in order to avoid repeating the same mistake. Conversely, Melancholic A will let himself be dragged down by the intense anguish over having failed to reach his objectives with this exam. Consequently, his self-confidence will suffer another serious hit, for the next few days (or maybe longer) he will close himself off from others and shun any contact with friends. It goes without saying that this event (the exam results that have fallen short of his expectations) will be embedded into his memory and called forth when the next similar fear trigger appears. It's a never-ending vicious cycle.

The Phlegmatic Type

If you've read Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the main character, Phileas Fogg, has certainly attracted your attention, given his idiosyncratic calmness and patience. He never seemed to be bothered by anything, but always kept his feet on the ground, no matter the gravity of a problem. He is an extremely meticulous man (a more melancholic-like trait) and rather unsociable. His smooth steps and slow pace make Mr Fogg the embodiment of the typical Englishman.

On the whole, these are the qualities of an ordinary phlegmatic. The main flaw that can be found among these positive points would be the lack of interest and incentive for almost any given activity (it takes a great deal of time and argument to motivate a phlegmatic to take action). He would prefer not to stand out, nor to get involved in any too demanding job. Hence his docility, which a more devious person can capitalize on. His low assertiveness often prevents him from speaking his mind out and, since he prefers not to contradict someone else's opinion, he will usually make a lot of concessions.

The representative emotion for a phlegmatic is...none! There is virtually no prevailing emotion that a phlegmatic can complain about. In fact, this is both his gift and his curse. On the one hand, phlegmatics are able to maintain a stable state of mind and keep their calm

even when the situation seems to have gotten out of control. Who wouldn't want to have an emotional switch to turn their emotions off once in a while? Phlegmatics have one. Or, better stated, they don't even need one, since their emotions are so low in intensity that they experience no problem at all when having to restrain them. It would take an extraordinary event to unsettle a stiff-upper-lip phlegmatic.

On the other hand, it is this slow or absent emotional reaction that, under some circumstances, prevents them from properly dealing with a challenge. Because they may not show any sadness when a close relative has died, their acquaintances might consider them cold-hearted or thoughtless and might try to avoid contact with them. Not enjoying the good results of a project the phlegmatic carried out with his team could make others question his participation and involvement and consider excluding him from the team in the case of future projects. .

A phlegmatic who is aware of the negative effect his lack of emotional input can have, will struggle to become "more human", in order to avoid being labeled a "heartless robot". In his case, the emotional management strategy would have to work the other way round, namely bring out the emotions lying within him instead of suppressing them. While others need to convince themselves of the futility of the emotion they are seized

with momentarily, phlegmatics have to find conclusive arguments for releasing that emotion.

The Sanguine Type

There is absolutely no chance of you failing to recognize a sanguine person in a crowd. Such is his craving for public attention that he will lose no opportunity to get in the limelight. At parties, he is the sprightliest dancer on the scene. At an ordinary outing with his friends, he plays the role of the raconteur while the others can hardly get a word in edgeways. In a classroom, the sanguine scholar is normally the most inattentive and playful, unceremoniously exhibiting his conspicuous behavior during classes in a quite blatant manner.

Sanguines are very skilled at making a lot of friends. While for a melancholic, it's the quality, not the number of his friends that counts, sanguines tend to place more weight on the quantity. In fact, I presume that everybody has a sanguine friend. They are so approachable and entertaining, that spending some time with them can actually act as a medicine for problems, by making you take your mind off the daily routine for a while. They are the masters of jokes and storytelling, even though their accuracy or validity is sometimes questionable. With an indisputable gift of the gab, they

are capable of keeping their audiences engaged for a considerable amount of time.

Without question it's happiness that best portrays a sanguine. However, his infectious optimism and high spirits, while his most reliable tools, are also his most treacherous gifts.

As I said, the pursuit of happiness is, from all accounts, the main purpose of our life, no matter how we define this term. Sanguines seem to have already reached this ultimate goal, since they know the art of living their lives to the fullest. They look at the bright side of a situation and never lose hope that things will eventually go right.

However, this "intoxication with happiness" can easily verge on overconfidence, which is pretty much the same thing as arrogance. No one likes conceited people, who look down on you. They are the most contemptible persons one can ever meet. Therefore, the most companionable individuals can become the most loathsome.

A sanguine's overconfidence can also turn him into a careless, negligent person. When the chairman is discussing the steps for executing a project within a meetin and assigning tasks to his employees, a sanguine will tend to commit himself to as many duties as possible, just to stand out among his colleagues. But chances are that he will not carry them through since his

commitment was rather superficial and he may have taken on too much to handle.

In other words, sanguine are willing to help, but sometimes lack the necessary level of involvement, so that they can accomplish their tasks.

They could benefit from the emotional management plan by trying to cut down on their excitement. By learning to neutralize their emotions, they can then enter the reflective state where they can judge much more clearly whether it is wise to hold on to their sparkling display or if a more sober demeanor would be more advisable.

Conclusion

Emotions are the essence of our existence and the dynamic force that offer each individual a different perspective on life and current events. You first have to learn about your own emotions and how to utilize them effectively. Only then will you be prepared to understand the people around you and develop the strong, long-lasting relationships that make for a successful and productive life.

Notes and recommended bibliography

¹ Ekman, Paul, *Emotions Revealed, Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*, New York, Times Books, 2003, Page 33

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