
In Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar, Mark Antony proclaimed to the crowd, "We have come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." Now more than 100 years after the publication of William James's The Principles of Psychology (1890), it would seem appropriate to praise James, not to bury him. Still, I would like to take a cue from Mark Antony. It is time to give a decent burial to James's famous theory of emotion as it was presented in the Principles (and earlier, in 1884, in the journal Mind). I will refer to this as "James's first theory," for he had a second, less well-known theory of emotion. This other theory has not received the attention it deserves, in part, because it was never explicitly formulated or labeled as a theory of emotion by James. Rather, it is largely implicit in a work, the topic of which is peripheral to the interests of most psychologists, namely, The Varieties of Religious Experience (James, 1902/1961). Drawing on another distinction made famous by James (1907/1955), his first theory appeals to the tough-minded empiricist; his second theory is more attuned to the tender-minded rationalist. But like most dichotomies, this one conceals as much as it reveals. In this chapter, I will try to give explicit formulation to James's
second theory, and I will argue that it is actually closer to the facts (more empirically based) than is his first.

JAMES'S FIRST THEORY

"My theory . . . is that bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion." (James, 1890, p. 449)

To be perfectly blunt, this theory has been a dead end. Or, more accurately, it has been an arduous detour leading to a dead end; along the way, it has exacted a terrible toll in time and resources. This may seem like a harsh assessment, considering all the research the theory has generated over the past century. But in their time, alchemy and astrology also generated much research—some of it quite valuable. As theories, however, they led nowhere.

James's theory is a dead end for two main reasons: First, it is irrefutable, and a theory that is irrefutable is empirically meaningless; second, by focusing attention on bodily changes during emotion, it has led investigators to ignore two important facts about human emotions, namely, (a) emotions are intimately related to a person's sense of self, both in terms of eliciting conditions and consequences, and (b) emotions can be understood only in the context of broader interpersonal and social relations.

A central tenet of James's theory is that feedback from bodily changes adds a certain emotional quale to an otherwise cold perception of the exciting event. Although this seems like a reasonable empirical hypothesis, it is irrefutable for three main reasons:

1. Although James emphasized the viscera as the primary source of feedback, any kind of feedback will do—if not feedback from the viscera, then from the striated muscles involved in posture and movement; if not from them, then from facial expressions. Discredit one source, and an appeal can be (and often is) made to one of the others. In James's own words,

   "If we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves, we must assiduously, and in the first instance cold-bloodedly, go through the outward movements of those contrary dispositions which we prefer to cultivate. . . . Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak in a major key, pass the genial compliment, and your heart must be frigid indeed if it do not gradually thaw!" (1890, p. 463)

2. The feedback need not be from bodily change. The nervous system can, in a sense, perceive its own activity. Thus, the mere
intention to respond, or the fantasy that one is responding, can, according to James, meet the requirements of his theory:

Under all these conditions [e.g., dreams, hallucinations, trance, ecstasy] one may have the liveliest subjective feelings, either of eye or ear, or of the more visceral and emotional sort, as a result of pure nerve-central activity, and yet, as I believe, with complete peripheral repose. (1890, p. 459)

3. In fact, there need not be even the intention to respond, real or fancied. The most fundamental assumption behind James’s theory is that feelings of emotion can be accounted for in terms of simple sensory processes. Sensory processes may be exteroceptive as well as interoceptive. It follows that the perception of certain configurations in the environment, and not just the perception of one’s own bodily responses, may be sufficient to elicit emotional feelings. This helps account for subtler emotions, for example, aesthetic feelings. Edmund Gurney (1884) in a critique of James’s initial (1884) publication of his theory, stated that he (Gurney) experienced much emotion when listening to, or even imagining a musical score. This presents no real problem, James responded,

In organizations as musical as Mr. Gurney’s, purely acoustic form gives so intense a degree of sensible pleasure that the lower bodily reverberation is of no account. ... I see nothing in the facts which Mr. Gurney cites, to lead one to believe in an emotion divorced from sensational processes of any kind. (1890, p. 470)

In other words, to disprove James’s theory, we would need a person who is completely insensitive to all bodily changes, who is not aware of his or her own motor impulses, and who is blind, deaf, and devoid of sensory processes of any kind. If such a person could experience emotion, the theory would be disproved. Such a person was unimaginable to James, and I presume to anybody else. (James did entertain the notion that disembodied spirits, which presumably have no sensory processes of the regular kind, might experience emotion. The theoretic raptures of ordinary human beings, he implied, might approach this disembodied ideal, thus providing a test of his theory.)

In addition to being irrefutable, James’s theory is severely limited in scope. Bodily changes, according to the theory, presumably “follow directly the perception of the exciting fact.” But what makes the fact exciting? The theory gives no clue. If a woman comes home one evening, and her husband says, as she walks in the door, “I am really angry with you tonight.” Is he simply giving a report of bodily changes as they occur? I think not. Some-
thing is obviously missing from the theory, namely, the meaning of the emotion.

Given that the theory is irrefutable and that it fails to account for important aspects of emotion, this question arises: Why has the theory remained so popular? The reasons are fivefold:

1. The theory has a grain of truth. The perception of bodily changes does add a certain quale to our experience. The problem is that bodily change (beyond that which accompanies any psychological activity) is neither sufficient nor necessary for the experience of emotion.

2. The theory fits with our popular conception of emotions as uncontrollable, primitive responses. Emotions are, colloquially speaking, gut reactions. This conception can be traced back to the ancient Greeks (Averill, 1974). Plato, for example, placed reason in the head, because the head is round, and rational thought, Plato believed, involves circular motion. Having localized reason in the head on largely symbolic grounds, Plato then placed emotions in the gut far away from the head so that they might interfere with reason as little as possible. Thus, in some respects, James's theory has both intuitive appeal and historical precedent.

3. In other respects, however, the theory is counterintuitive. For example, most people believe we run because we are afraid. To turn this sequence around seems like a real discovery. Psychologists like nothing better than seemingly counterintuitive discoveries. It demonstrates to skeptics that psychology is a science after all!

4. The theory fit the emerging behaviorist paradigm in American psychology. If feelings are the product of bodily changes, rather than the cause, they can be ignored without loss of explanatory power.

5. The theory is simple. James claimed that he was surfeited by too much reading of classic works on emotion. He would "as lief read verbal descriptions of the shapes of the rocks on a New Hampshire farm as toil through them again" (1890, p. 448). Nowhere do such works give the kind of deductive or generative principle that is "the beauty of all truly scientific work" (p. 448). His theory, he believed, provided that generative principle. And "having the goose which lays the golden eggs, the description of each egg already laid is a minor matter" (p. 449).

This last point deserves brief elaboration. James recognized that description and classification are propaedeutic to any science. Yet, he found
such endeavors tedious. Many others evidently have agreed. As a result, our theories of emotion have been built on a very narrow base. Fear, anger, grief, and love have been the primary emotions investigated, yet literally hundreds of other emotions are recognized in ordinary language. James, himself, did not even mention in his Principles such states as hope, pride, and guilt, all of which have at one time or another been considered basic (or fundamental) human emotions.

James made prominent mention of Darwin in his chapter on emotion. What if Darwin had been equally surfeited on descriptions of barnacles and finches, and instead had, from his armchair, searched for a generative principle of biological evolution? Good theory, particularly in the human and biological sciences, must rest on the kind of detailed observation that James found boring, but that Darwin found fascinating.

Fortunately, the situation is changing. During the past decade, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the classification of the hundreds of emotions recognized in ordinary language (e.g., Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Storm & Storm, 1987) and to a broader sampling of emotions for investigation. Such a broadening of the empirical base is one of the most important things that has happened to the field of emotion since James discovered his goose that lays the golden eggs.

To summarize the discussion thus far, James's theory of emotion as presented in the Principles is both irrefutable and limited in scope. In recent decades, a number of attempts have been made to overcome these shortcomings and, in one form or another, neo-Jamesian approaches are still among the most popular in psychology (cf. the facial feedback theory of Tomkins, 1962–1963, or the autonomic feedback theory of Schachter, 1964). My own opinion is that the theory should be laid to rest. We should not waste time trying to repair it, for that will only distract us from more important tasks. At most, we should pay passing homage to it, and then move on. In doing so, we would, ironically, be following in the path of James.

**JAMES'S SECOND THEORY**

"A foolish consistency," Emerson (1841/1968) asserted, "is the hobgoblin of little minds." No one can accuse James of foolish consistency or of being hostage to hobgoblins. Perhaps in a few years, we will celebrate the centennial of The Varieties of Religious Experience, which was published in 1902, for the Varieties contains a far richer and more insightful theory of emotion than does the Principles.

At the outset of the Varieties, James warned against the dangers of physiological reductionism:

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**JAMES'S OTHER THEORY OF EMOTION**
There is not a single one of our states of mind, high or low, healthy or morbid, that has not some organic process as its condition. Scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions are; and if we only knew the facts intimately enough, we should doubtless see "the liver" determining the dicta of the sturdy atheist as decisively as it does those of the Methodist under conviction anxious about his soul. (1902/1961, p. 30)

The Varieties is a very discursive work. It is impossible to summarize its main insights with a few short propositions. To provide the gist of James's second theory, therefore, I will pick one thread that runs through the entire work. That thread has to do with creativity, but on the emotional rather than on the intellectual level. "When a person has an inborn genius for certain emotions, his life differs strangely from that of ordinary people, for none of their usual deterrents check him" (1902/1961, p. 215).

Einstein was a genius in science; Mozart, in music; Jefferson, in politics; Napoleon, in warfare. But what does it mean to be a genius in emotion? James focused on a lack of "usual deterrents," which is a characteristic feature of creative people in general (Albert & Runco, 1986). To be creative, a person must be willing not only to innovate and change, but also to pursue single-mindedly a vision, even at the risk of personal misfortune and social censure. But there is more to creativity than that.

Following Wallas's (1926) work, it is common to divide creative activity into four phases: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Although James antedated Wallas by several decades, he used some of the same terminology in his second theory of emotion.

How small an additional stimulus will overthrow the mind into a new state of equilibrium when the process of preparation and incubation has proceeded far enough. It is like the proverbial last straw added to the camel's burden, or that touch of a needle which makes the salt in a supersaturated fluid suddenly begin to crystallize out. (1902/1961, p. 151)

The incident that occasioned these remarks involved a young man who gave up his religious faith on hearing a minor remark from his brother. James believed that similar processes can be observed in more commonplace emotional reactions, such as falling in (and out of) love: "Falling in love also conforms frequently to this type, a latent process of unconscious preparation often preceding a sudden awakening to the fact that the mischief is irretrievably done" (1902/1961, p. 152).

This "sudden awakening" is the equivalent of Wallas's phase of illumination. The person feels overcome by emotion, as though struck by the proverbial bolt of lightening. But the feeling is more illusion than fact.
Emotions do not just happen any more than scientific or artistic inspiration just happens. The development of effective emotional responses typically requires a good deal of preparation and incubation. After repetition, of course, an emotional response can become habitual and unthinking, just like any other kind of response. But if we want to understand underlying processes, the habitual is probably not the best place to begin.

What might correspond to Wallas's fourth phase, verification, in the case of emotions? A scientific insight is verified if it meets certain standards of logic and empirical test. A work of art is verified if it meets standards of aesthetics and public acceptance. An emotional response is verified if it is adaptive, that is, if it proves to be a viable solution to the problems facing an individual or society.

Emotions can be adaptive (verified) in a variety of different ways, depending on the type of emotion and the context. In the Varieties, the kinds of verification of most concern to James were those "in which the sand and grit of selfhood incline to disappear" (p. 225), and the person enters into more harmonious relationships with his or her environment. Although this is only one possible outcome, it does reflect a broader truth. Emotions necessarily involve the self. In fear, the self is perceived as threatened; in anger, as affronted; in grief, as diminished; and in love, as reaching out to another. It follows that there can be no fundamental change in the emotional life of a person without a corresponding change in the self and vice versa (Morgan & Averill, 1992).

But relating the emotions to the self is only a first step. As Mead (1934) emphasized, the self derives its meaning, in large part, from its embeddedness in a broader social network, and so, too, do the emotions. Every culture has emotions that are considered basic within the culture, but seem relatively incomprehensible to members of other cultures. A wealth of detailed cross-cultural comparisons is another of the most important things that has happened to the field of emotion since the time of James (e.g., Levy, 1984; Lutz, 1988; Rosaldo, 1980; Shweder, 1985).

Although James did not explicitly relate emotions to culture, the dependency of emotion on broader belief systems is implicit in his second theory. The religious convert, for example, knows that he or she has arrived, not when there is an intellectual acceptance of the new belief system, but when the emotions defined by the system are experienced.

To summarize, I have analyzed one thread in James's complex analysis—the thread having to do with emotional innovation and change. I have chosen this particular thread because it happens to coincide with some of my own research interests at the moment (Averill & Nunley, 1992; Averill & Thomas-Knowles, 1991). I could have analyzed other threads, but the conclusion would have been the same. Namely, it is misleading to claim, as James did in the Principles, that bodily changes "follow directly the
perception of the exciting fact." Typically, the exciting fact is itself the end product of a long process of preparation and incubation. It is even more misleading to claim that the emotion is "our feeling of the same changes as they occur," for this assertion robs the emotions of much of their meaning and significance. Closer to the truth is James's contention that

The best thing is to describe the condition [emotion] integrally as a characteristic affection to which our nature is liable, a region in which we find ourselves at home, a sea in which we swim; but not to pretend to explain its parts by deriving them too cleverly from one another. (1902/1961, p. 225)

If this passage sounds a bit mystical—it is, because James was referring to such states as religious rapture, moral enthusiasm, ontological wonder, and "cosmic emotion." However, the statement applies mutatis mutandis to emotions of all sorts. Indeed, if we read it figuratively yet carefully, it can serve as a brief summary of James's second theory of emotion. An emotion is "a sea in which we swim"—an ever changing sea, I might add, whose contours are shaped by three entities: the body, self, and society. Particular note should be taken of James's admonition "not to pretend to explain [the] parts by deriving them too cleverly from one another." That is precisely what he tried to do in his first theory of emotion.

I will conclude with an observation from James's own conclusion to the Varieties. James commented that, on rereading the manuscript, he was "almost appalled at the amount of emotionality" it contained (p. 377). Why should that have appalled him? He was, after all, writing a book on varieties of religious experience, not varieties of religious thought (i.e., a book on theology). I suspect that one thing that bothered James was the apparent irrelevancy of the generative principle that he had so forcefully advanced 12 years earlier in the Principles. Stated most baldly, the "goose which lays the golden eggs" turned out to be a sterile turkey when it came to the analysis of actual emotional experiences. In saying this, I am not criticizing James, who seemed to have recognized the limits of his first theory. On the contrary, I am suggesting that we follow James's lead. Let us give his first theory a decent burial; then let us get on with the task of analysis. There is no better place to begin that task than with the insights and wisdom of James's other theory.

REFERENCES