A SYSTEMATIC CLASSIFICATION OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

A necessary step in the systematic analysis of any body of scientific knowledge is the development of an orderly and logical classification system. Such a system is one which ranks the universe of knowledge of a subject in mutually exclusive categories—from the more general to the more specific. Such a system not only places available pieces of knowledge in a logical context, but also serves the desirable end of identifying, and partially characterizing, those components of the total subject about which little or nothing is known. The periodic table of the chemical elements is an outstanding example of a systematic classification system. Very often, the link between theoretical and practical science arises from a classification system derived from theory and then validated by practical experimentation.

The behavioral sciences have been noteworthy for tardiness in developing logical classification systems. Feasibility, however, has been suggested by the author in respect to a classification scheme for the social sciences and a systems analysis of the human thinking process. The problem of performing a similar task in systematically classifying the emotions would seem, at first glance, to be most difficult because of the general vagueness with which this subject is generally discussed. Nevertheless, if the phenomenology of emotions alone is considered, the task is not as difficult as it seems. This report proposes to accomplish this task.

To illustrate the nature of the confusion which has surrounded the use of the term “emotion,” and the other terms which have been used for the same phenomenon (“affect,” “feelings,” “passions”), some random examples of definitions are cited below. It is interesting to note that many discussions of the issue of “emotions” in both past and recent literature have begged the issue of definition.

1. An early example of the concept that emotions (or passions) are indications of frustrated activity was expressed by James Vere in 1778. Vere was a London merchant and a governor of Bethlem Hospital who wrote of “that internal restlessness and disorder
in man which has been the complaint of all ages.” He stated: “The two great principles which actuate all animated bodies are appetite or desire, and aversion or dislike. But in the accomplishment of their ends, namely the gratification of desire and the repelling whatever man dislikes, these principles cannot in the usual rotation of things operate always with success. Hence nature will be impressed with some inconvenience, and also stamped with some particular mark or character whereby to express the absence of any good that is wanted, or the presence of any ill that is felt. And from this source certain sensations arise, which are usually distinguished by the name of passions. For example, desire or aversion when successful gives ease, but if opposed by any rival power, then anger will arise. If their operations are attempted with great danger, fear will ensue. And when their aim is wholly interrupted by a conscious inability of success, grief in general will be the consequence.” In this case, emotions are assumed to be entirely unpleasant sensations.

2. Alexander Crichton, instructor of medicine at Westminster Hospital, discussed the issue in a book which he published in 1798 on “mental derangement.” He described “passions” as a sequential process ultimately originating in pleasure or pain. “That no passion can arise without previous desire or aversion, and that no desire or aversion can occur without previous feeling of pleasure or pain, are axioms the truth of which will be granted as soon as they are sufficiently reflected upon. The passions are to be considered... as a part of our constitution. They produce beneficial and injurious effects on the faculties of the mind.” Not only do the passions have a preceding “cause,” but they can also be the “cause” of something else.

3. Parr’s Medical Dictionary of 1810 uses the term “pathema” as synonymous with “passion” and defines it as follows: “Much inconvenience seems to have arisen from the metaphorical language employed. Affections, emotions and passions have not been clearly distinguished nor has it been carefully pointed out that they are degrees only of similar changes in the brain. Emotions and passions imply active energy and can be either exciting or depressing, and can, in turn, be of either violent or moderate degree. Anger and ecstasy are examples of violent, exciting emotions, while terror and grief are examples of violent, depressing ones. They are occasioned by the sensible impressions (sensations)