



## Emotions and Behavior

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*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 38, No. 3. (Mar., 1978), pp. 410-418.

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## DISCUSSION

### EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

In *Action, Emotion and Will*, Kenny writes that "there is, again, no particular form of behavior which is characteristic of an emotion in the way in which eating is characteristic of hunger" (p. 48). I want to begin this account of the relation between emotions and behavior by using this interesting observation to show that any claim about behavior being typical of an emotion must be seen as a claim about typical behavior in a much looser sense than an equivalent claim in the context of an appetite such as hunger.

Eating is characteristic of hunger because it is the only thing that satisfies hunger. But there is no particular 'form of behavior' which satisfies an emotion and so can in that way become so closely associated with it as to be said to be characteristic of it. For example, fear might be construed as including a fairly simple and straightforward desire that some danger be avoided, and that some desire for safety be satisfied. But, when examined closely, avoiding danger is not a straightforward piece of behavior in the way that eating is. One can avoid danger by running away (if the danger is, say, a bomb which is about to go off), by killing something (if, say, the danger is from a wild animal), or by not going somewhere (if the danger lies in being too close to a cliff's edge), and so on. In fact the whole notion of the emotions "being satisfied" seems odd; partly because their appetitive aspect (the wants or desires that they include) does not seem to be a demand that some item be supplied which, when supplied, will appease some craving or dissolve some tension; and partly because, anyway, they do not always aim at a satisfaction in the sense of appeasement. While with emotions such as anger the concept of appeasement may seem to fit, with emotions such as joy and love it seems completely inappropriate.

An emotion is not merely a bodily event, and so cannot be a simple bodily craving that must be silenced or relieved. A man is hungry if his body is in a certain condition, no matter what he believes, and so gives rise to the simple and definite want that this condition be changed. Thus hunger leads to a fairly clearly defined form of typical behavior. A man is undergoing an occurrent emotional state only if, among other things, he *believes* certain things about some thing, person, or state of affairs. These beliefs in turn generate quite a large number of *desires*, such as, with fear, the desire to avoid or be rid of the danger, or, with love, the desire to be with the beloved, to please her, to cherish her and protect her, and to have her return the

love. All of these desires associated with a single emotion must mean that an emotion cannot lead to a very clearly defined form of typical behavior. For most of these desires can be cashed out in a great variety of ways. For example, with regard to the emotion love one can fulfill the desire to please someone by sending her a present, by obeying her commands, by caring for her when she is ill, by helping her in her work, by making jokes to cheer her up when she is sad, by taking her out to dinner, by doing a myriad of things. So, it can be argued with some justification that, if more or less any item from a large spectrum of behavior can be reasonably expected in any love situation, then the whole notion of 'typical behavior' must be very much loosened if it is to be applied to an emotion such as love.

O. H. Green seems to feel that, not only do we link behavior to emotions as typical expressions of them, but that we have grounds for saying that the link between emotions and such typical behavior is conceptual. He seems to hold that some sorts of emotional behavior come already branded with an emotion word. He holds that, if we are to recognize emotions in others, definite sorts of behavior must be conceptually connected with certain emotions so as to form part of their definition, rather than be merely causally connected in various ways. Green writes in "The Expression of Emotion," - *Mind*, July 1970, that "it is necessary that emotion-terms are defined by reference to a person's behavior in certain circumstances," and that the "behavior which is described in defining emotion-terms must be typical" and that behavior which is typical is, generally speaking "behavior which is at least subject to a person's control or modification" (P. 552). (I am taking it that what is part of the definition of  $x$  is necessarily part of the concept of  $x$ ; though not vice versa.)

In reply to Green, I would like to argue that there are several senses in which behavior can legitimately be said to be typical of some emotion or characteristic of some emotion, but that none of these implies that there must be a conceptual connection between the emotion and the behavior which is typical of it.

One sense of 'typical' is that in which smoke is said to be typical of fire. This sense of 'typical' seems best to be explained by saying that from our knowledge of how fires 'work,' and from our experience of a number of fires, we can say that smoke is a *natural concomitant* of most types of fires. The word 'natural' is used here because smoke is related to certain types of fires as the natural physicochemical resultant or manifestation of the burning of certain materials.

By analogy, in the emotional context, tears are the typical resultant in

the sense of natural resultant of grief or sadness, for crying seems to be part of the physiological reaction which constitutes part of the occurrent emotional state of grief or sadness. Embracing might be said likewise to be typical, in this sense of natural, of love in that it is a manifestation that results or wells up naturally from some appetitive aspect of some sorts of love, some such want as that to be physically close to the beloved which, in turn, is derivable from one of the general wants, associated with love, namely the want to be with the beloved and to share his or her life.

Yet, because the relation of smoke to fire, and of actually embracing (as distinct from the more general want from which it stems) to love, does not hold in all cases of fire and love, then there can be no *conceptual* tie-up between fire and its natural manifestation and between love and its natural manifestation. Just as there are smokeless fires, so there are loves, such as that between a teacher and his pupil, and that between an abbot and his monks, in which embracing is considered inappropriate; and even genuine cases of erotic love or maternal and paternal love in which circumstances inhibit embracing.

Another sense of typical is the merely statistical sense of *commonly or frequently found as a concomitant of*. Thus an acrid smell might be said to be typical of fire insofar as it is a concomitant of most types of fire. But not all fires have such a smell, and so it cannot be part of the concept of fire as such. For the burning of pine logs, sandalwood, and incense (and, no doubt, a number of other substances) gives rise to a sweet smell. Muttering endearments may be said to be an expression which is statistically common and hence typical of certain types of love, such as adult homosexual and heterosexual love, and maternal love, but not of other types such as fraternal and filial love.

Another sense of 'typical' in this context would be that in which avoiding coming into contact with the flames is considered to be a typical reaction to fire. This sense of typical is that of *appropriate or sensible or rational response* to fire. It is a voluntary conscious response though it may be based on previous reflex reactions to having been burnt by flames. By analogy, refusing to go up the Eiffel Tower would be the appropriate, sensible, or rational response for someone with a fear of heights.

But because one can imagine cases of people acting rationally but not avoiding fires (people committing suicide, motorcyclists who leap through flames in circuses, fire-eaters), and of people with a fear of heights acting rationally but climbing up to high places (to save someone, to escape

something, for example), then we must say that there exists no conceptual tie between what this sort of behavior is typical of and the behavior itself.

One rational or appropriate reaction (avoiding a fire in order not to be burnt, avoiding high places because of one's fear of them) may be considered more typical than another reaction which is also rational or appropriate (not avoiding fire in order to perform a trick for gain, not avoiding heights in order to win a considerable bet), because the former is not merely the statistically more usual of these appropriate reactions but the better grounded of the two. It is not merely appropriate and predictably so, it is the more rational, all things considered. So behavior which is not merely appropriate or sensible in the circumstances but *the most appropriate* in the circumstances, amounts to another separate sense of typical behavior.

A fifth sense of typical would be that of *conventional behavior*, which neither naturally flows from the feelings or attitudes or other aspects of an emotion, nor is a rational reaction or response to an emotional situation. There does not exist a ready example in the context of fires, though one could imagine that it was a convention in certain countries that, whenever a fire was lit or broke out, then one threw a piece of one's clothing into it because of a superstition, no longer believed but mechanically followed, that if one did so then one would never be consumed by fire. In the context of the emotions, we might take love as the example here. Examples of love behavior which are typical yet neither particularly rational (though not necessarily irrational) nor natural, nor even statistically very common (at least nowadays), would be strong though culture-bound conventions such as the sending of Valentines, the wearing of engagement rings (when this is taken to symbolize not merely a promise of marriage but a relationship of love as well—this convention *is* still quite common), and "saying it with flowers." This sense of typical behavior does not even begin to make a claim to be conceptually tied to whatever it is typical of. Behavior becomes conventional through habit, through the breakdown of the belief which made it a rational response, through a partly historical and partly aesthetic liking for the behavior itself, or all three, or something else again. The very difficulty in clearly describing the link between conventional behavior and what it is behavior of, points to the fact that it is neither a natural nor rational response to anything, and has little or no logical connection with what it symbolizes by convention.

Conventional behavior will only be linked typically or characteristically to what it is behavior of, if a sufficient proportion of people adopt it. The

conventional behavior of people in love in the town of Onitsha in Nigeria, or the love-behavior of the Blackfoot Indians of Calgary in Canada, will not be typical of love as such if they do not occur outside Onitsha or outside the Blackfoot Tribe. Then, something only qualifies as a convention in the above sense, if a significantly large number of people do it. If only I, or one or two others, parted their hair in the middle whenever they fell in love, this would not qualify as conventional behavior. It would only qualify as 'a personal eccentricity,' a term which by definition implies minority behavior. Eccentricity ceases to be eccentric when a sufficient number of people adopt the eccentricity.

I think then that I have given grounds for rejecting O. H. Green's view of the relation between emotions and behavior as typical and thereby conceptual, but there is a less implausible view of the link between emotions and behavior. This view which I have already hinted at when discussing Kenny's views, is that the concepts of certain emotions, though not all, include certain reasonably specific *wants*, though not wants to do behavioristically specific things. In the case of love for example, one of these specific wants is that the love be returned. Now, it is hard to pin down what sort of actions would follow from wanting one's love returned. Kindness, flattery, attentiveness towards the object of love, . . . or all three, or none of these? Kindness, flattery, and attentiveness could all be said to be appropriate to wanting one's love returned, because they could all be said to stimulate or be likely to stimulate affection. But, on the other hand, so could a hundred other actions or pieces of behavior, such as gallantry, generosity, boasting, and in some circumstances feigned indifference and self-sufficiency. It does not seem possible to delineate with any specificity what actions would follow from a want such as a want that one's love be returned. The concepts of love and some other emotions almost certainly entail more than one want or desire and so in consequence will almost certainly not entail just one type of behavior, (supposing that such wide-ranging wants, considered singly, could entail any definite behavior). On the other hand, anger and despair, for example, do not seem to contain any specifiable wants at all as part of their concept; and, in this sense, they are less active emotions than love or fear. What behavior that does occur in the context of such emotions would have to be attributed to wants that arise out of the personality of the person having the emotion rather than from the emotion.

Then there is another factor which partly explains why it is hard to predict exactly what sort of behavior will result even from emotions which

have specifiable want or appetitive aspects. Behavior motivated by, say, fear will vary according to *the object* of fear. As Kenny himself says in another place, "The behavior which is actuated by a fear of getting fat is not the same as that which is actuated by a fear of getting thin."<sup>1</sup> The same will be true of, say, love. Love of a soldier for his comrade-in-arms may typically take the form of sharing his food packages from home with him, encouraging and protecting him during the stress of battle, and generally being in his company more than in the company of the other soldiers. The love of a pupil for a teacher may take the form of verbally defending the teacher against any criticism, being on his best behavior in that teacher's class, laughing at all the teacher's witticisms both weak and strong, and doing his homework for that teacher with exceptional care. So, without knowing a great deal about the object of the emotion in question, one cannot get very far in predicting what sort of behavior will result from that emotion. And even knowing the kind of object, in the case of an emotion such as love, will not get us very far. One must know a great deal about *the subject* of the love as well. Upon hearing that Ferguson loves O'Reilly, one cannot even begin to predict what Ferguson will do in O'Reilly's presence without knowing a great deal more about both Ferguson and O'Reilly, such as their age, sex, status, and temperament.

I have argued elsewhere that feelings and physiological changes are said to be of or associated with particular emotions as a result of a causal hypothesis linking the feelings and physiological changes with the emotion.<sup>2</sup> Here I want to argue that behavior as well is associated with an emotion only insofar as it is believed that the behavior is caused, indirectly, by the beliefs and evaluations (or appraisals) which make up the cognitive elements of the emotions in question, and, proximately or directly, by the wants which make up the appetitive elements of such emotions. There may be, as I have already hinted, emotions such as anger or despair which are exceptions to the above model. For it may turn out that, for example, anger is to be defined merely as the emotional reaction to a belief-plus-an-evaluation of a certain kind; and that the filling out of the 'emotional reaction' aspect does not include a reference to any behavior as being even usually present. But I suggest that my discussion of the connection between emotions and typical behavior does suggest that such emotions are the exception and not the general pattern.

<sup>1</sup> *Action, Emotion and Will*. P. 99.

<sup>2</sup> In 'Physiological Changes and the Emotions,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. III, No. 4, June 1974; and 'Emotions and Feelings,' *Ratio*, Vol. XIX, June 1977.

Behavior needs to be interpreted or to have at one time been interpreted for us; it does not come already interpreted. We have to connect the behavior to an emotion and we seem to do this on the basis of a causal hypothesis. We say that putting one's hands at the back of someone's head and then running one's hands up and down the neck is fondling and caressing, rather than an easing of the crick in that person's neck, because we have first identified the situation as one of love. This identification may be made in various ways. But what is necessary is that we have some sort of clues or information which may allow us to guess or realize that the person, who is manipulating the neck of the other person, loves, merely pities, or is compassionate towards him or her, or is merely overjoyed about something. In the first place, the clues may be ones as to the state of mind (beliefs, evaluations, appraisals, and wants . . .) of the person manipulating the other person's neck. If we had no previous information as to such a person's state of mind; and if the one whose neck was being manipulated and the one who was doing the manipulating did not display any behavior which we might in any sense call typical of the object or subject of some emotion, then we probably could not guess what emotion was causing the manipulating; or even guess if it was a question of an emotion. The above situation would be further complicated if both persons concerned, say, had their back to us, such that we could not see their expressions.

Of course, actual situations are normally full of clues as to what exactly the behavior going on is caused by; we hear snatches of conversation, we see facial expressions, we see behavior which may be said to be typical in one or some of the senses of that term which I have already discussed. And, in a great number of situations we are knowledgeable observers. We already know about or have some information about the beliefs, evaluations, and wants of the persons whose behavior we are watching. We don't have to look for further clues.

So while, as I have argued, no particular behavior is part of the concept of love, and if the behavior described above is not a mere conventionally adopted sign of love, then to interpret this behavior as being *love* behavior, one must be able (ultimately at least) to deduce, correctly or incorrectly, that the behavior in question is done *out of love*. That is, it is to deduce that the behavior is *caused by* love, that is caused by the part of the emotion love which connects up with behavior, the want or desire aspect.

Grahame Green puts some of the things I have been trying to say about the connection between emotions and behavior in a rather interesting way in his novel *The End of the Affair*. The protagonist, Bendrix, is recalling his



past: "I would have liked to have left that past time alone, for as I write of 1939 I feel all my hatred returning. Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions. If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ?"

In this paper I have been mainly concerned to argue against any tight conceptual connection between emotions and behavior. Now in conclusion I feel that I should redress the balance a little by stressing the part that behavior does play in emotional occurrences.

Behavior, particularly if we include utterances under this term,<sup>3</sup> will usually be the starting point for attributing some emotion to someone. Asking for a first person emotion-statement will, I suppose, always be the preeminent method of finding out if someone has some emotion. But since people can and do tell lies, and can be and often are mistaken about their own emotions, we will always want to check these avowals by reference to other indicators, and I think that it is correct to say, as Bedford has, that "I do not believe that we either do, or should, take any notice of anyone's protestations that, for instance, he loves his wife, if his conduct offers no evidence whatsoever that he does."<sup>4</sup> But this could be misunderstood. It cannot mean that behavior is conceptually related to the notion of an emotional state in general in the way that physiological disturbances are. I can think of someone being emotional but not engaging in any sort of conduct; he may, for example, be sitting there looking and feeling embarrassed but not be doing anything. So I think that what Bedford means is the following. I do not think that we would *believe* that, say, someone loves his wife, if he has *never* acted in a way that exhibits that love, particularly if it is known that he did not so act on occasions on which he would be expected to show his love for his wife by his conduct. A fortiori we would not believe that someone has a certain emotion if he has often acted in a way that is incompatible with that emotion. The reason for arguing thus, or part of the reason, is that we do look upon behavior as an 'external' or public indicator of 'inner' or private states, such as the beliefs, appraisals, and in particular the wants aspects of emotions. If no behavior that could be interpreted as stemming from, say, love, is ever present in a putative love relationship, then

<sup>3</sup> I have in fact dealt with these separately in 'A Note on Emotion Statements,' *Ratio*, Vol. XV, No. 1, June 1973.

<sup>4</sup> In "Emotions," originally in *P.A.S.*, Vol. LVIII, 1956-1957; reprinted in *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, ed. Gustafson. Macmillan: London, 1967, p. 85.

there is good reason to believe that the wants which make up part of the very concept of love, and which usually lead to actions or behavior, are not present.<sup>5</sup>

Finally Bedford is not, or should not be arguing that essential evidence for saying that X loves Y is that X has shown typical love behavior or behavior motivated by love on some one particular occasion, for to say this would be to adopt the view of O. H. Green, against which I have already argued.

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<sup>5</sup> This point about behavior being the usual and most reliable indicator of emotions will be less true in the purely aesthetic context, such as that of watching a film. For, as J. R. S. Wilson has put it (in *Emotion and Object*, Cambridge: University Press, 1972, p. 83), "it may be a distinguishing feature of aesthetic emotions, as opposed to real life ones, that they are dissociated from behavior."