

DAVID PAPINI

THE TASTE OF EMOTIONS

Rediscover the flavor of life
and live better with oneself and others



FrancoAngeli/Trend

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Original Italian Edition, *Il sapore delle emozioni.*
Ritrovare il gusto della vita per vivere meglio con se stessi e gli altri

Translation by Valeria Abate
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Preface to the English edition

It is such a pleasure to read David Papini's emotional writing. That is, it is a most pleasing experience to read David Papini's thoughts on, with, and about feelings.

Thoughts on feelings, by and of Papini.

We promise you that you could do quite a bit worse with your time than spend a few hours with this gifted man. Enjoy his survey of – and his creation of – some very choice bits of the art and science of effective emotional living.

Yes, you could do quite a bit worse. And no better.

The present volume will give you a rich look into the foremost elements of the emotional world we all inhabit. What feelings are, how they feel to feel them, how to map them to body, to posture, to your overall state of being; how to use and express the potent information your feelings hold; how your feelings help you, guiding your choices and actions, adding immediacy, truth and a vastly greater presence to all our lives; how we often make unnecessary mistakes with our emotions; how we join in common misunderstandings about them, and carelessly adopt ineffective behaviors respecting them; how we mistakenly repress what we feel, what we *are* emotionally; and how we confuse these powerful, clean, and rapid-fire signals from our soul in our attempts to process them intellectually.

We define maturity as feeling and thinking simultaneously. And it is Rationality Itself that demands the integration of emotion and thought.

David's many clarifying examples and helpful exercises will guide you through a complete survey of your own ability to feel, will pose good things to think about what you feel, and will delineate ways to integrate these various modes of your consciousness into a more cohesive life.

Spend some time with this small, big book. Share it with someone you love. Feel things together. Enlarge your empathy and understanding.

Taste, *taste* your emotions.

Learn to taste them as a connoisseur might taste a great meal. Enjoy everything about them as you consume them in your conscious experience. Then, live large – and ever larger still – with the limitless energy and nourishment that will surely follow.

Jim and Michelle McCarthy

September, 2014

Crystal Lake

Woodinville, Washington, USA

Preface

I have known David Papini for a long time. We are bonded by a deep friendship and a common view of life. It is perhaps for this reason, he offered me the pleasure of writing some lines to introduce his book. I thank him for this.

The Taste of Emotions, talks about emotions using a professional approach. But a text on emotions cannot be only “technical”. The way he deals with this theme tells his story, his experience, his studies. And this is all translated into a path of reflection which analyzes situations, conjectures problems, and opens new perspectives.

In my opinion, this is exactly where the power of this book originates: more than being the object of a professional study, emotions have been the distinctive feature of his being human, the compass that guided his life. He makes this pretty clear through his writing. Way too often we read experts’ analyses which sound cold and distant, even if they are lucid and of good quality. Words with a human as well as a professional path behind them have totally another depth, another strength, another taste. David Papini’s words belong to this category.

We should also consider something else, something which lies in the folds of this book and which makes it especially precious. Nowadays the absolute inappropriateness of our knowledge and expertise in the field of emotions is an increasingly urgent issue. Within our families, where emotions flow free, unconstrained and unaware, no wonder sometimes they

surprise us as if they were coming from another person. At school, we invest in the cognitive aspects and the notional competence of the students, without paying enough attention to the emotional aspect, which nevertheless significantly determines the results of their learning. Grownups exhibit their poor knowledge of emotions in a large variety of communicational and relational situations. Without exaggeration, we could talk of a widespread emotional illiteracy pervading our society.

Therefore, we feel a strong need for an emotional education – the need for someone who helps us orient in the universe of emotions, both our own and those of the others; the need for someone who provides us with a tool for reflection and action which is clear and simple, and most of all, useful.

This is the intention of this book, which carefully avoids common-places and rhetorical temptations that are often typical of the professionals of emotions. On the contrary, it walks us through a journey to discover ourselves and our darkest sides, which we hide more or less consciously. This book is written in a straightforward and clear language, suitable for all, and it suggests some simple exercises, which are particularly effective along this path of self-revelation.

We need to point out at least another element of this work so rich in incentives. Over and over, David Papini underlines how emotions affect us completely, also concerning our thoughts and our body. Therefore, the distinction between rationality and emotionality proves to be false and illusory, although it is widely rooted in public opinion. Furthermore, this distinction inspires one of the most common stereotypes of gender identity, associating emotionality to the feminine and rationality to the masculine, which also attributes a negative connotation and weak character to emotionality.

On the contrary, David Papini attempts to restore dignity and value to emotions, showing us how important they are in our lives. We need to start to “feel ourselves” again, to learn how to listen to the emotional signals that we receive from ourselves and to read them. These are signals that we often neglect because we are too deeply immersed in our rushed everyday routine. However, this requires an act of faith in the possibility of change: changing our emotions and changing “with” our emotions.

This book is particularly intended for those who work in relationships and with relationships, especially in the field of education. But it is actually relevant for all those who believe in emotions and have the desire and the pleasure of working on themselves, bravely, without any fear or pretense.

Ludovico Arte

Sociologist, Dean of I.T.T Marco Polo - Florence, Italy

A twenty year's long migraine

I was eleven-years-old, sitting in my family's kitchen at our home in Florence, Tuscany. It was winter. I know that because the dimmed yellow lights in my apartment were on and I just had my afternoon snack. I had headache. As I discovered later, that pain at one eye, was not exactly a headache (that's what my parents called it), it was migraine.

For the following twenty-five years, being a migrainer (or migraineur) was a stable and consistent part of my identity. It defined me: every week, sometimes twice a week, I was unable to do anything except lying in bed in a dark room with a pillow pressed on my hurting right or left eye. Migraine was the cause of my absences at school or at parties (it happened on weekends two thirds of the times) and also the standard and easily believed excuse for skipping lessons I did not like.

I went through all the medical checks and painkillers available at the time, sometimes well before the age for which they were recommended.

Migraine shaped my school times as well as my relationships. Migraine was also my culture: my paternal grandfather, my maternal grandmother, my father and my mother had "headaches". Each of them had his favorite painkiller and I remember dinner conversations about their efficacy and effects. Oliver Sacks' book *Migraine* (Sacks, 1970) became my bible, sometimes I found myself longing for fascinating symptoms I did not have, like mosaic or cinematic vision, or Lilliputian vision (which I had once) or being proud to share such a pain with ancient mystics like Hildegard from

Bingen. Other times I took comfort from the statistics, showing that expectancy of life was higher for migrainers than for the general population.

I even dated girls who had migraines: I remember a loved one whose attacks started with aphasia (she was unable to speak for a couple of minutes), then blindness (another couple of minutes) and finally exploded with pain. As many of those in this tribe, I used caffeine at industrial quantities; my ten to twelve espressos per day were exceptional even for an Italian.

I was crippled by migraine.

I was lucky enough to land my first job in the early nineties at the same time a new drug, Sumatriptan¹, was approved for migraine treatments. It was able to kill my pain in half an hour: enough to be able to stay at work while having an attack. Before Sumatriptan, it would take from one to three days to recover from an attack: in a sense that saved my career.

So, now I still was a migrainer, only equipped with an effective pain-killer.

The funny, so to speak, thing, was that I discovered that killing the pain did not kill migraine's other symptoms², for example irritability or the sense that "something is wrong with the world". Can you imagine what effects can have on other people someone who has no pain but is over-sensitive to lights or sound, is irritable, depressed (without no depression diagnosis, of course), hyperactive and so on? He or she can be a very unpleasant partner, colleague or friend to deal with.

Basically this is who I was by the time I reached my mid-thirties: a smart, unpleasant, irritable, passionate, suffering, medicated, divorced executive. Yes, I made a career but it was a migrainer's career.

Then, ten years ago, my journey reached a turning point, I parted company with my longtime friend, migraine, and I slowly discovered other ways to live my life.

This book is about what I learned.

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumatriptan>.

2. Before the attack: Constipation, Depression, Food cravings, Hyperactivity, Irritability, Neck stiffness, Uncontrollable yawning. After the attack: feeling of being drained and washed out, euphoria. See: www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/migraine-headache/basics/symptoms/con-20026358.

Introduction

Emotions are in fashion. Perhaps this is a reaction to the great emphasis given to technique and technology. In fact, the number of books and publications on empathy and emotions, which are outside the scientific realm, is increasingly high among a variety of sectors.

An economist like Jeremy Rifkin writes, *The Empathic Civilization*; whilst a philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, writes *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*; in addition, my mailbox is filled with advertisements of courses with titles like “Emotional expertise increases sales”.

While I am writing these lines, the saga of the former Olympic champion Alex Schwazer¹, who has been found positive for doping at the London 2012 Olympics, has just concluded. Alex “explained” his action; commentators overflowed with “explanations” and “judgments”; the Carabinieri corps suspended him; his girlfriend judged him, and so on.

Explaining and judging are two basic activities for science and justice, but looking closer, regarding Alex’s gesture, what do they “explain” and what do they “judge”? One might think that explaining and judging have a basic lucid rationality, but in Alex’s case, what do they explain?

An already victorious athlete decides to carry out a practice that would endanger his entire life (his career, his private life, his personal dignity, his

1. www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/olympics/article-2185412/London-2012-Olympics-Alex-Schwazer-breaks-failed-dope-test.html.

friends, etc.) to increase (of course, without any guarantee) the chances of having a performance in line with his past victories. Therefore, he commits a stupid act, from the point of view of both logic, odds and the proportion between risk and reward. Moreover, that act was so contrary to his moral ecology that as soon as he did it, he hoped to be unmasked².

We can explain what he has done (meaning that we can illustrate and list the facts), we can judge what he has done (meaning that we can distinguish his behavior from the correct one), but we cannot really “get it”³, unless we decide to read and listen to it in the perspective of emotions. Get it and contain the fear, the ambition, the pride, the envy, the strain, the vulnerability, and the shame that pushed Alex to make his decisions before and after EPO.

The glasses of emotions cannot explain or judge actions in retrospect; instead, they should be used to guide them first and then understand them later. Before long Alex will look back at the man who decided to dope and he will see him as a man who has taken an inexplicable decision. He will remember the thoughts he had when he made that choice, but he will not really understand who that man was, unless he is able to *feel* what he was experiencing while deciding to act.

The glasses of emotions are a paradox, because they allow us to understand ourselves, others and relationships without hiding behind “explanations” which cannot explain and “evaluations” which cannot understand value.

With this book I will try to convince you that the only rational way to act and achieve what we want, is to “feel” emotions and to use them to guide your actions.

One of the contraindications of using the language tools of explanation and judgment is that while we need to take decisions before taking actions, explaining and judging are two acts *a posteriori*. In fact, if we can judge a behavior, it means that it has already occurred. Cartesian rationality states that we can decide future actions on the basis of explanations and judgments that we have made in previous similar situations. But actually, this happens seldom in our real lives, otherwise smokers would have already quit smoking, we wouldn't be in relationships or situations we promised not to be involved in anymore, we wouldn't be doing things we said we didn't want to do, and so on.

2. Since this book was written, Lance Armstrong and Oscar Pistorius stories developed as well, and I think the same paradigm I talk about Schwazer, applies to them also.

3. In Italian one of the words translate as “to understand” is “capire” which comes from the Latin “capere”, which translates into English as “to get” and in Italian has also the idea of “to contain” something (Translator's Note (TN)).

On the other hand, what really matters to our decision making process is our ability to *understand emotionally* and to *feel*, which are normally not completely conscious. It is not possible to make decisions regardless of, or against, our emotions, but it is possible to use, or even change, our emotions so that our actions reflect our intentions.

And this is the theme of this book.

For a long time work and school environments have placed emphasis on technical expertise and on “knowing things”, to the detriment of the idea of knowing how to be and how to do.

Stating that we are all made of body and mind, thought and matter, rationality and emotion, Cartesio mistakenly (Damasio, 1994) pushed us to choose or oscillate between one or the other, and as a long term result, we have forgotten the basic expertise of “feeling” our body and our emotions.

As most of us have lost obsolete technical expertise (like starting a fire with a stone, recognizing the North Star, discerning many different smells, etc.) because we no longer need it in our daily life, we have also lost awareness of what happens within our body, as well as the fundamental support that we need in order to be happy and achieve what we want.

This is how Jacqueline Morineau summarizes the problem:

We multiply techniques, methodologies, we develop a know-how which is intent on “competitive” efficiency. But we don’t know “how to be” anymore. We hide behind concepts. Among these, the concept of “communication”, for example, has been so generically extended and deprived of its meaning, that most of the times it only leads to an illusory form of relationship. We forgot that we need to look at what is essential, to be able to assume our human condition (Morineau, 2000).

What is essential is the ability to stay in touch with our emotions and with those of the people who interact with us, rather than settle for what we can and what we know.

How to use this book

The first section of this book, up to Chapter 7, explores the realm of emotions and the ideas that we have concerning them, trying to understand and experiment with how we can use them.

From Chapter 8 onwards, you will find some exercises and examples on how to use emotions to change and achieve what you want. You do not need to read the chapters in order, because each one offers distinct food for thought, exercises and examples, which can be read separately. However, the ideal itinerary of this book goes from “learning to feel” to “acting by feeling”.

This book is intended to be a practical manual: it offers some ideas to “use” your own and others’ emotions as much as possible. Every theoretical reference I use is with the sole purpose of supporting my invitation to “feel” and integrate emotions in every relevant aspect of your life and your relationships.

Why I wrote this book

In the last ten years my work time has been equally divided between training students at Post-graduate master’s courses, executive coaching and technical consulting for companies. Before that I have been an executive in national and multi-national companies. In every context I’ve been working, I realized emotions were often considered an undesirable byproduct of human interaction, ignored and poorly understood or used by individuals and organizations. Even those among my students who were trained psychologists, knowing everything in theory about emotions, seemed to have difficulties in using them effectively. The only context where emotions seemed to belong, was the medical-psychological one: “got emotions? Take a pill or go to therapy!”. When I met a book, called “Paura di sentire” by the Italian psychotherapist Michele Giannantonio (Giannantonio, 2012) telling that at the core of most of his patients problems he finds the “fear of feeling”, I decided that I wanted to do something to help people to give value to emotions not only when their soul becomes ill but in their everyday life, sharing what worked for me also.

“How are you? Fine, thanks”

I wonder if that happens to you too. I am really confused when people ask me “How are you?” My first memory about this confusion and its related discomfort dates back to when I was eleven-years-old. It is probably because it is commonly assumed that it is a parents’ responsibility to know how their children feel without having to ask them, that before that age nobody usually asked me how I felt. But when we start to interact with people who are neither our parents nor our siblings, it is no longer taken for granted that they actually care about how we feel.

I think that my confusion arose when I first tried to answer that question as if it was a *real* question, a tool of my interlocutor to get some information about me, and not just some sort of greeting with a question mark stuck at the end. In short, there was always something wrong. I have never known what to answer: was it a question? Or was it just that kind of question that grownups ask, but to which everybody seems to know the answer already? Then, I realized that:

1. If the greeting did not have a question mark, I did not feel uncomfortable.
2. If it did have a question mark, I felt less uncomfortable when the verb of the greeting did not directly refer to me, but to some external event (such as the variations: “How is it going?” or “What’s up?” instead of “How are you?”).

When I was eleven I concluded that what really bothered me was not knowing whether my interlocutor actually wanted to know something

about me or if he was just greeting me. I suppose that at some point I have had the unpleasant experience of answering by telling something about me and then realizing from the reaction of the other person that they were not interested in my answer.

This problem of “semantics” is described by Stephen Pinker in an episode of the sitcom *Seinfeld*, in which a girl asks the protagonist, George, if he wants to go up to her place for a cup of coffee. George says no thanks, because caffeine would keep him awake all night. In a later scene, slapping his forehead, George exclaims, ‘Coffee doesn’t mean coffee! Coffee means sex!’ (Pinker S., 2009).

When I was about eleven I also started suffering from headaches...

But that’s another story. Let’s not talk about me, but about you: how are you? The question mark is intentional. I mean: how are you now, in this very moment? How do you “feel”? Take some time to answer fully...

Have you answered?

When was the last time that you asked yourself, “How am I?” That probably does not happen too often, unless there is something wrong.

Every year I ask this question to a group of graduate students of Psychomotricity in Bergamo University, at the beginning of the first lesson of the laboratory of emotional intelligence and active listening. I invariably receive some generic answers, more or less related to the state of the people answering the question. However, the second question I ask remains more often unanswered. I ask, “And what about me: how am I?” At this point, only a few brave students try to reply, overcoming the double surprise of being asked to say something about the emotional state of a yet unknown teacher. Sometimes the bravest ones guess it right.

In this way the students experience how easy it is to consciously realize how others feel.

It is easy to perceive another human being’s emotional states because we were all born¹ with the necessary equipment to detect them. We generally use this equipment unconsciously, but we should train our ability to use it in a conscious and intentional way.

The aim of this book is to show you how to train this ‘equipment’ and what a powerful tool it is to obtain what we want from ourselves and from others.

I will walk you through the discovery of emotions, with the aim of demonstrating that frequenting our own and others’ emotions has powerful

1. Scientific research on the subject (including mirror neurons) is extremely wide by now. See (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2008) as an example.

effects on our actions. This allows us to obtain what we want from ourselves and from others and to understand what truly happens in the world of relationships we are immersed in.

Whenever possible, I will also suggest some useful practices to train your emotional “muscle”.

We can use two fundamental tools to face this journey and deal with emotions: body and language.

Training emotions means training our body perception and the conscious use of our body in relation to the world. Emotions are born/arise from and live in our body, interpreted as the totality of our organs (brain included), and they are generated by the continuous communication between the different organs. The brain can induce bodily emotional states and many other organs can generate emotions that are then processed by the brain.

The second tool we can use is language: with words we can induce emotional states both in ourselves and in others. Specific signals of our emotions lie in our words, tone and rhythm. The stories we tell with words are powerful generators of feelings and emotions.

It is commonly understood that language evolved from motor skills. Darwin’s observation (Darwin, 1872-2007, 39) of the movements of jaw and tongue while we use scissors is quite famous: anyone who can remember his first time cutting a sheet of paper will probably remember having his tongue between his teeth.

Personally, I think that the idea of language being a motor action is really fascinating. Others (Pinker S., 2002) underline that the semantics of language is imbued with basic ideas, which are borrowed from the physical world, to the point that speaking is a metaphor for action. The so-called “embodied simulation theory” postulates that motor and visual areas in the brain are used also to create meaning, not just to act or perceive². Chapter 11 will analyze this aspect in depth.

This book is focused mainly on the second tool, language, because a book, which is made of words, allows little direct solicitation of the body. However, where possible I will also propose some bodily exercises.

But there is yet another reason for this choice, which lays the foundations for the correct way of working with emotions: emotions are practical, concrete, and alive. Working with emotions means handling, experimenting with them and not just talking about them in order to curb them. Using our body to work on emotions has the advantage of a work which has no mediation, which is much more captivating and straightforward.

2. For a review of the last decade studies see (Bergen, 2012).