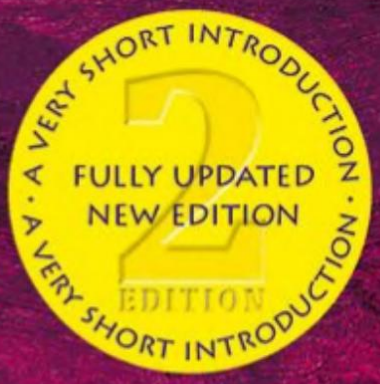

Dylan Evans

EMOTION

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

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SECOND EDITION

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Preface to the second edition

This is a fully revised and updated edition of *Emotion: A Very Short Introduction*, which was first published under the title *Emotion: The Science of Sentiment* in 2001. A great deal has happened in research on emotions since then, and this new edition incorporates some of these new developments. However, the main outlines of the story remain the same.

The scientific study of emotion owes much to the philosophers of the Enlightenment. David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid all wrote at length about the sentiments and the passions. These thinkers believed that emotions were vital to individual and social existence. Smith did not just found the 'dismal science' (economics); he also helped to pioneer the 'sentimental science' (the psychology of emotion). In his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), he proposed that emotions were the thread that wove together the fabric of society. Like Hume and Reid, Smith did not regard emotion and thought as implacable enemies. For all of these thinkers, it was rational to be emotional, and no science of the mind could be complete without also addressing the heart.

The Romantics rejected this view, reviving an older view of emotions as fundamentally at odds with reason. Humans were faced with a stark choice between emotion and reason, and the

wise ones chose to follow their hearts rather than their heads. To return to innocence meant listening to one's feelings rather than consulting logic. The secrets of sentiment were to be unlocked by poetry, not by science.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the Enlightenment view of emotion. Unlike the Romantics, I do not believe that emotions are fundamentally at odds with reason, nor that we should always follow our hearts rather than our heads. Rather, like Adam Smith, I believe that intelligent action results from a harmonious blend of emotion and reason. I believe that a creature without emotions would be less rational than us, not more, but I also believe that there are times when it is better to listen to the head rather than the heart. Knowing when to follow our feelings and when to ignore them is a valuable talent that some have called 'emotional intelligence'.

In this book I argue for a return to the view of emotions as reason's ally, not its enemy. Like Smith and Hume, I believe that the scientific study of emotion is not only possible, but of great value. This is not because I think we can ever reduce emotional experience to a dry formula. However, thinking more clearly about emotion need not be opposed to feeling more deeply. It is my hope that knowing more about how emotions work can help us to lead richer lives, not poorer. At the very least, it can be exciting to learn about the recent scientific advances in our understanding of these mysterious phenomena.

Scientific interest in the emotions underwent something of a renaissance in the 1990s. For much of the 20th century, research in the emotions was confined to a few psychologists and even fewer anthropologists. Today, however, things are rather different. Emotion is now a hot topic. Many anthropologists now reject the view that emotions are culturally specific. Cognitive psychologists have abandoned their exclusive focus on reasoning, perception, and memory, and are rediscovering the importance of affective

processes. Neuroscientists and researchers in artificial intelligence have also joined the debate, contributing further pieces to the jigsaw. This book attempts to step back and put some of these pieces together.

Needless to say, a short book like this cannot hope to cover all aspects of such a complex area. I have had to leave some very interesting areas of emotion research to one side. The reader will not find, for example, a discussion of how emotions develop in children, although this too is a burgeoning area of study. Nor is there any mention of the growing literature on individual differences in emotional experience. My choice of topics reflects my own idiosyncratic interests and my guesses about what will prove most interesting to a general audience.

The word 'emotion' is fairly recent. Before the 19th century, people talked instead about 'passions', 'sentiments', and 'affections'. Chapter 1 begins by outlining the complex history of these words. It then goes on to explore the variety of emotional experience in different cultures. Every culture has its own emotional climate, and I draw on anthropological research that has documented some of these variations. However, many anthropologists now think that the differences between emotional experiences around the world are minor when compared with the similarities. In Chapter 1 I argue that emotions constitute a kind of 'universal language' that binds humanity together into a single family. Our common emotional heritage goes deeper than the cultural differences that set us apart.

We owe this shared emotional repertoire to our common ancestry. We are all descended from a few thousand hominids who lived on the African plains 100,000 years ago. Many of our emotions were forged in this bygone age. Many more emotions go back even further, to a time when our ancestors were not even human. In Chapter 2 I explore the evolutionary history of emotion and argue that emotions were—and still are—vital for survival. Emotions

are not just luxuries. Still less are they obstacles to intelligent action, as many philosophers have believed. The creators of *Star Trek* were wrong to suppose that the Vulcans, an imaginary alien race that had learned to suppress their emotions, would be more intelligent than humans. Spock notwithstanding, an intelligent creature that lacked emotions simply could not evolve.

Of course, we now live in very different environments from those in which our ancestors evolved. In particular, we have many means of inducing happiness in ourselves that our ancestors never even dreamt of. In Chapter 3 I discuss these 'technologies of mood' that promise to provide us with short cuts to happiness, from psychotherapy and art to drugs and meditation. I ask whether or not they work and discuss the dangers that beset some of these attempts to circumvent the more circuitous path to happiness that natural selection laid out for us.

In Chapter 4 I explain how emotions affect 'cognitive' capacities such as memory, attention, and perception. The power of emotions to affect these things makes emotional technologies very appealing to advertisers and politicians. Appealing to feelings offers a way of making people change their minds without having to provide good arguments or evidence. I conclude the chapter by exploring some of the recent research in the psychology and neuroscience of empathy.

The most recent discipline to have entered the debate on emotion is artificial intelligence. Since the early 1990s, computer scientists have become increasingly interested in building emotional machines, and workers in robotics are already making some progress in this area. In the final chapter I discuss these recent developments and speculate on where it will all lead. Will we succeed in building robots that have feelings just like we do? And what might be the consequences of such technology? Research in this area is moving fast, and I have completely rewritten this

chapter to reflect the advances that have taken place since the first edition of this book was published in 2001.

I do not pretend to have the last word on emotion. A really good theory of emotion may remain forever beyond our grasp. However, I find the scientific study of emotion illuminating and fascinating. I hope that reading this book will lead you to share my enthusiasm.

Dylan Evans

October 2018

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Adapted from Sasaki K, Ihaya K and Yamada Y (2017) Avoidance of Novelty Contributes to the Uncanny Valley. Front. Psychol. 8:1792. © 2017 Sasaki, Ihaya and Yamada. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01792.

The publisher and the author apologize for any errors or omissions in the above list. If contacted they will be pleased to rectify these at the earliest opportunity.

Chapter 1
What is an emotion?

The word *emotion* is a modern invention—and not a particularly helpful one. The first books to use the word in the title do not appear until the 19th century. The most famous of these is *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, by Charles Darwin, which was published in 1872.

Philosophers and poets had been writing about things like anger, pity, and fear for thousands of years, of course, but they had never before grouped these mental states together under a single umbrella. On the contrary, they had been more concerned to draw distinctions between them, categorizing some of them as passions and desires, and others as affections and sentiments. Thus, when the Scottish psychologist Alexander Bain announced, in his 1859 book *The Emotions and the Will*, that he would use the word *emotion* to cover to 'all that is understood by feelings, states of feeling, pleasures, pains, passions, sentiments, affections', he was marking a fundamental shift in the vocabulary that we use to describe how the mind works.

Behind this terminological shift lay a deeper conceptual revolution—the birth of modern psychology, a self-professed 'scientific' approach to the study of the mind, modelled on the natural sciences, especially physiology. The pioneers of this new

approach were explicit about their desire to break with traditional ways of discussing and studying the mind, which were inextricably bound up with theology and ethics.

Take theology first. The emergence of scientific psychology in the 19th century was closely linked with the decline of Christianity among the elites in Europe and North America. Scientific psychology was explicitly cast as a new, thoroughly secular approach to the study of the mind, in contrast to the long tradition of Christian thought which had dominated this and most other areas of study in the West for the previous fifteen centuries. Words like *passion*, *lust*, and *desire* all had a biblical pedigree which the pioneers of scientific psychology wished to dispense with. The term *passion* in particular was associated with the Gospel accounts of the sufferings and death of Jesus. By replacing all these words with a term like *emotion*, which was free of such connotations, the new scientific approach signalled its distance from theological ways of thinking.

Even older than the theological framework was that of ethics. Long before Christianity had appeared on the scene, the philosophers of Ancient Greece had given a central place to things like pity, fear, and anger in their debates about the good life. Plato (*c.*428–348 BC) famously divided the mind into three distinct faculties or elements: reason, appetite, and *thumos*, which can be variously translated as 'anger', 'spirit', or 'indignation'. This analysis seems distinctly odd from a modern perspective. Contemporary psychologists might wonder why Plato singles out anger from the other emotions and reserves a whole faculty of the mind for this particular feeling. What about sadness, fear, and guilt? Where do they figure in this account? Yet this simply highlights the distance between ancient approaches to the mind and that of today. Psychologists may now group together a variety of mental states in a single category called emotions, but that is a modern invention, and would have made no sense in Ancient Greece.

For Plato, the whole point of dividing the mind into three distinct parts was to understand how best to live. It was not what we today would call a 'scientific' exercise, which is supposed to be objective and value-neutral, but an ethical one. The good person, in Plato's view, is one in whom all three elements of the mind are in harmony, and each element performs its proper function. This is only possible, Plato taught, when both appetite and *thumos* are subordinated to reason.

This idea was developed into a whole system of thought by another Greek philosopher, Zeno of Citium (*c.*334–262 BC), the founder of Stoicism. The Stoics taught that the good life consisted in freedom from all passions (*pathê*). The passions, as the Stoics understood the term, were strong feelings that troubled the mind such as intense anger and excessive joy. The passions, they argued, are like mistaken opinions, since they arise from putting too much value on things that are not really so important. The wise person does not value trivial things, and so attains peace of mind (*apatheia*). This is not a complete absence of feeling; on the contrary, the Stoic who judges things correctly experiences contentment (*eudaimonia*) and good feelings (*eupatheiai*), but these are mild and sweet rather than strong and stormy.

Stoicism has been a remarkably persistent influence in Western thought. Far from dying out with the rise of Christianity, it was woven into theology by Christian thinkers from Boethius (477–524) to Justus Lipsius (1547–1606). But there is something odd about this, as there is about many other attempts to combine Christianity with Greek philosophy. The founder of Christianity is quite the opposite of a serene Stoic. Jesus flies into a holy rage when he sees the temple in Jerusalem filled with merchants and money changers, and drives them out of the temple with a whip. When he is dying on the cross, he cries out in agony: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' A major strand of Christian piety celebrates these strong emotions, from Saint Augustine to

Saint John of the Cross. As Martha Nussbaum observes, the Christian idea of love is unashamedly passionate, even erotic:

> We hear sighs of longing and groans of profound desolation. We hear love songs composed in anguish, as the singer's heart strains upward in desire. We hear of a hunger that cannot be satisfied, of a thirst that torments, of the taste of a lover's body that kindles inexpressible longing. We hear of an opening that longs for penetration, of a burning fire that ignites the body and the heart. All these are images of a profound erotic passion. And all of these are images of Christian love.

Whatever the relationship between Stoicism and Christianity may be, the self-professed 'scientific' approach to the mind that arose in the 19th century wanted to dispense with both of these traditions. Psychology was to be morally neutral, free from the ethical framework in which the Greek philosophers had couched their approach to the mind, and completely secular, free of religious connotations. And to make this abundantly clear, psychologists needed a new vocabulary. The word *emotion* fitted this need perfectly.

The problem was, nobody knew what the new word really meant. When the Edinburgh professor of moral philosophy, Thomas Brown, used the term in his lectures in 1810–20, he told his students that 'the exact meaning of the term *emotion* is difficult to state in any form of words'. Two centuries later, things are not much clearer. Psychologists still disagree about how to define the term. As the philosopher Thomas Dixon wryly observes, 'this is hardly surprising for a term that, from the outset, was defined as being indefinable'.

Yet this may not be as much of a problem as it seems. For although a precise definition may prove elusive, it remains true, as Thomas Brown stated in his Edinburgh lectures 200 years ago, that 'every person understands what is meant by an emotion'. The word

emotion may, in other words, be rather like jazz, in the sense that you know it when you see it, or feel it, even though you can't define it. Or, as the jazz musician Louis Armstrong famously quipped, 'If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know.'

Basic emotions

Instead of attempting to provide a concise definition of emotion, it may be more fruitful to identify some typical examples. Few people would deny that anger, fear, and joy are emotions. When it comes to enumerating a complete list of emotions, however, there is little consensus. The British psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen identified close to 1,000 emotion words in the adult English lexicon and classified them into 23 mutually exclusive categories. Other researchers argue for a smaller number of categories.

In an attempt to make sense of these widely differing approaches, the philosopher Paul Griffiths divides emotions into three distinct groups: basic emotions, higher cognitive emotions, and culturally specific emotions. Basic emotions include joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust (see Box 1). Basic emotions are universal and innate. This much is clear from the fact that babies who are born blind still make the facial expressions typical of these emotions—smiling, grimacing, and so on. Emotional expressions are not like words, which differ from culture to culture; they are closer to breathing, which is just part of human nature.

For a large part of the 20th century, many anthropologists rejected the idea that any emotions were universal or innate, for they subscribed to a view known as the cultural theory of emotion. According to this view, emotions are learned behaviours, transmitted culturally, much like languages. Just as you must first hear English before you can speak it, so you must first see others being joyful before you can feel joy. On this theory, people living in different cultures should experience different emotions.

Box 1 Basic emotions

Basic emotions are universal and innate. They are of rapid onset and last a few seconds at a time. Researchers disagree about how many basic emotions there are, but most would include the following in their list:

- Joy
- Distress
- Anger
- Fear
- Surprise
- Disgust

Some researchers call these emotions by different names. It is common, for example, to see 'happiness' and 'sadness' in the list of basic emotions. I think these words are better used to describe moods rather than emotions (see Chapter 3), so in this book I use the words 'joy' and 'distress' to refer to basic emotions and reserve the terms 'happiness' and 'sadness' for good and bad moods.

In the late 1960s, while this view of emotion was still the reigning orthodoxy, a young American anthropologist called Paul Ekman set out to find firm scientific evidence in its favour. To his great surprise, he ended up doing just the opposite. Ekman's studies provided the first scientific evidence that the cultural theory of emotion was badly off the mark.

Ekman's methodology was simple but clever. He travelled to a remote, preliterate culture (the Fore, in New Guinea) to ensure that the subjects had not seen Western photographs or films, and so could never have learned Western emotions. Ekman then told them various stories, and asked them to choose, from three