

THE SOCIAL EMOTIONS OF DISGUST AND ADMIRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE

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Abstract

I will focus my attention on two particular social emotions, disgust and admiration in the following paper. How we express them, what do they mean, what does their “language” look like? What are the mechanisms of their expressions? Emotion of disgust and admiration create significant part of our living, but in communication and literature we do not reflect them explicitly. Inspired by Charles Darwin conception and Jonatan Haidt research, I will focus mostly on expression of disgust and admiration regarding evolutionary conception in the submitted paper.

Keywords: *emotions, disgust, admiration, language, face, aesthetics, cognition*

“The face is a primary signal system for emotion; the voice is a secondary system. The face is always active but the voice only when you talk. But these are the ways in which we signal emotions to others and that show involuntary changes, so if you want to do research on emotion, the face is the key.”

Ekman Paul

INTRODUCTION

We may say without exaggeration, that Charles Darwin 's book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was the very first scientific beginning of emotion research. The first edition of Darwin 's book was published in 1872, thirteen years after the *Origin of Species by Means of natural Selection, or the Preservation of favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* and one year after *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Darwin had been collecting material since 1838). His research was focused on the question of how the expressions of the emotions in man were analogous to those in animals in the context of his theory that man and animals were derived from a common ancestor.

Darwin considered emotions as separate discrete entities, such as anger, fear, disgust, and understood the most important organ of their expression the face.

I will focus firstly on definition of the terminology. Paul Ekman mentioned in his cross-cultural study six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. (Ekman 1992, p.169-200) Many years before his research reflected emotions philosopher René Descartes in his *Passions of the Soul*, from 1649, dedicated to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia wrote: „But the number of those which are simple and primitive is not very great. For do but review all those I have cast up, and it may easily be noted that there are but six such, to wit, admiration, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness, and that all the other[s] are compounded of some of these six, or are sorts of them. Wherefore, that the multitude of them might not perplex the readers, I will here treat distinctly of the six primitive ones and afterwards show in what manner the rest derive their pedigree from them.“ (Descartes 1989, p.39)

I may also mention contemporary definition of emotions reflected by philosopher Andrej Démuth, who connects psychological, philosophical, evolutionary, neurobiological and neuroscientific interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of emotions. He considers emotions „...multidimensional objects which form continuously divided space, in which it would be possible to

differentiate individual units of meaning well on the basis of different saturations of individual dimensions.“ (Démuth 2019, p. 19) I will pay attention on the terms *disgust* and *admiration* now.

DISGUST IN PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

Aristotle presented the basic emotions of anger, love, hate, meekness, fear, courage, shame, kindness, compassion, envy and rivalry in the 2nd book of Rhetoric in relation to the speaker's personality. He does not interpret the emotion of disgust, nor does he use this term in Rhetoric, he interprets emotion of cataphronesis, contempt, which may be the closest to social emotion of disgust.

Jean Paul Sartre has described in his book *Nausea* deep and existential experience of disgust, which has been gushing from his main character 's feelings of persons, things around him, his own face and body. *Nausea*, one of the canonical works of existentialism is the story of Antoine Roquentin, a writer who is horrified at his own existence. In impressionistic, diary form he ruthlessly catalogs his feelings and experiences. His thoughts culminate in a pervasive, overpowering feeling of nausea which “spreads at the bottom of the viscous puddle, at the bottom of our time — the time of purple suspenders and broken chair seats; it is made of wide, soft instants, spreading at the edge, like an oil stain.” (Sartre, 1964, p. 21)

And further: „Things are bad! Things are very bad: I have it, the filth, the Nausea. And this time it is new: it caught me in a cafe. Until now cafes were my only refuge because they were full of people and well lighted: now there won't even be that anymore; when I am run to earth in my room, I shan't know where to go... The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it out there in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the cafe, I am the one who is within it.“ (Sartre, *Nausea*, p.16)

Roquentin's predicament is not simply depression or simply anxiety, although his experience has pushed him to that point, Sartre presents Roquentin's difficulties as arising from man's inherent existential condition. *Nausea* is disgust at the traumatic decomposition of the divine within existence, symptomatic of the discovery of the absurd, of the disenchantment of the world. Transcendence and providence were invented by man. Every being is meaningless in itself. There is no God according to Sartre but the experience through nausea ends up taking a positive turn. If God doesn't exist, then everything becomes possible. And that's how, with despair, true optimism begins. Disgust means in this context not only experience and feeling but existential necessity how to process absurdity and senselessness of being. We may say, it is a kind of existential therapy.

DISGUST IN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONTEXT

Disgust belongs to the seven universal emotions and arises as a feeling of aversion towards something offensive. We can feel disgusted by something, or someone we perceive with our physical senses, by the actions or appearances of objects, people, and surprisingly even by ideas. (Ekman 2003, p. 66-68) Disgust contains a range of states with varying intensities from mild dislike to intense loathing. All states of disgust are triggered by the feeling that something is aversive, repulsive and or toxic. The universal trigger for disgust is the feeling that something is offensive, poisonous or contaminating. Some triggers for disgust are universal (such as encountering certain bodily products) whereas other triggers are much more culturally and individually influenced (such as certain types of food) (Ekman 2003, p.66-68).

Compact Oxford Dictionary defines disgust as „strong revulsion or profound indignation“. (Compact Oxford Dictionary 2003, p.311). Emotions can influence moral cognition. There are experimental studies that repugnance is typically an effect of moral judgment, not a cause. (May, 2020: 156) „Eating an insect might disgust you, but it needn't have any relation to your moral beliefs, either as an effect or as a cause. However, when there is a connection between a moral belief and repugnance, the emotion may be elicited by the belief, not the other way around.“ (May, 2020: 156) The universal function of disgust is to get away from, block off, or eliminate something offensive, toxic or contaminating (Ekman, 2003).

„One evolutionary benefit of disgust is to keep us away from or remove things potentially dangerous or damaging to keep us safe and healthy (e.g., not eating something putrid, staying away from open sores to avoid catching an infection or disease, avoiding interactions with “morally tainted” people)“ (Ekman 2003, p. 66-68).

Disgust can be also dangerous. Many societies teach the avoidance of certain groups of people deemed physically or morally disgusting and, thus, can be a driving force in dehumanizing and degrading others, which may reach to superiority, prejudices and other social deviations. On the other hand, disgust can be suppressed:

While witnessing gross bodily functions like bleeding, defecating, vomiting etc. in others often evokes disgust, this reaction is suspended when it is someone with whom we are related, or close. „Intimacy lowers the threshold for what we consider disgusting. So, while we still may feel some degree of disgust, it is reduced enough that we are able to help those we care about. Now, rather than try to get away, we are called to reduce the suffering of the loved one (e.g., changing a baby's diaper or taking care of a sick family member).

Etymology

The word disgust came into English in 1601 from the Old French "desgouster" meaning distaste, loathe or dislike, in the sense of giving a bad taste to one's mouth and from Latin des (dis) gustus, which means tasting. The word gustus was very common from the beginning of the 19th century from Italian gusto which can be translated as "taste," from Latin gustus "a tasting," related to gustare "to taste, take a little of," English first borrowed the French form, geste "organ of taste; sense of taste" (mid-15century), but this became according to Etymology Dictionary obsolete. (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/gusto>)

ADMIRATION

Admiration belongs to positive emotions in response to an outstanding person or object. This emotion should serve to keep a person's ideals and values accessible as guides for behavior and also contribute to the adoption and internalization of ideals, values, and goals (Schindler 2013, p. 85-118). As mentioned in Schindler, "...admiration is elicited by outstanding role models who represent specific ideals or values. The excellence of such models, at least in principle, can be understood, matched, and even surpassed by others" (Schindler 2013, p. 85-118). Moral function of admiration may be seen in encouraging others who aspire to grow by showing that it is possible to actualize ideals. The action tendencies associated with admiration are to uphold and honor ideals. The admiring one seeks to praise and affiliate with the other as well as to emulate the other's conduct. The primary function of admiration is to enhance the individual's agency in striving for ideals (Schindler 2014).

Etymology

The word admiration is in English the noun of the verb admire, which is defined as „regard with respect or warm approval; look at with pleasure.“ (Compact Oxford Dictionary 2003, p. 13)

Etymology of the word admiration reaches into the early 15 century, from Old French *admiration* which means "astonishment, surprise" and from Latin *admirationem* "a wondering at, admiration," noun of state from past-participle stem of *admirari* "regard with wonder, be astonished," from *ad* "to; with regard to" and *mirari* "to wonder," from *mirus* which may be translated as "wonderful". The sense has gradually weakened since 16 century toward "high regard, esteem." (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=admiration>)

SOCIAL AND MORAL DIMENSION OF DISGUST AND ADMIRATION

Disgust is a response to physical objects and to social violations as well. For example Lazarus resorted to unite the physical and social aspects of disgust: "taking in or standing too close to metaphorically speaking an indigestible object or idea." (Lazarus, 1991) Haidt argues that "disgust grew out of a distaste response found in other animals, which was then shaped by evolution to become a more generalized guardian of the mouth. Disgust rejects foods not principally for their sensory properties but for their ideational properties (e.g., the source of the food, or its contact history)" (Haidt, 2003). According to Haidt, in many cultures and languages, the words and facial expressions used to express disgust towards rotting meat or feces are also used to condemn social transgressions that do not involve the body in any physically disgusting way (Haidt, 1997). For example, for Westerners, socio-moral disgust can be described most succinctly as the guardian of the lower boundary of the category of humanity. People who "de-grade" themselves, or who blur the boundaries between humanity and animality, elicit disgust in others (Haidt, 2003). The action tendency of disgust is according to Haidt often prosocial. Those who trigger moral disgust, people in a society set up a reward and punishment structure that acts as a strong deterrent to culturally inappropriate behaviors, particularly those involving the body (homosexuals, transgender people etc.). (Haidt, 2003) Disgust rejects foods not principally for their sensory properties but for their ideational properties (e.g., the source of the food, or its contact history)" (Haidt, 2003). According to Haidt, in many cultures and languages, the words and facial expressions used to express disgust towards rotting meat or feces are also used to condemn social transgressions that do not involve the body in any physically disgusting way (Haidt, 1997). For example, for Westerners, socio-moral disgust can be described most succinctly as the guardian of the lower boundary of the category of humanity.

MEANING OF DISGUST AND ADMIRATION CONSIDERING FACE

The face is a fascinating nucleus of crystallisation for the divergence of attitudes and questions about the nature of human beings, their identity, emotions, boundaries, culture, roles, the function of looks, beauty, religion, imagination, memory and many more phenomena. The face is a primary signal system for emotion.

Every person, and most animals, has a face. When we meet others, the first and most important aspect that we notice is their face. It is a crucial piece of our orientation in society and provides an estimation of the properties, characteristics and emotions of strangers. Can we imagine how difficult it would be to communicate with a person who had lost most of their face? Facial perception is part of our everyday contact with others. When we meet family members, friends, colleagues, unknown persons, and see people on TV or on billboards, we focus on the face. More attention is paid to the face than to clothes, body proportion, voice, smell, gestures or any other feature.

There is a lot of useful information in the face. It serves as a method of orientation as we can recognise sex, health, age, emotional and social status. It triggers feelings about other people; some are more beautiful or intelligent than others.

The face is a guide which helps us to create ideas and attitudes towards the people we meet. The significance of the face in our social life is not random, we can follow its source to the past (Blažek, Trnka, 2008).

In fairy tales, heroes and heroines are attractive and villains are not. This pattern can be seen in literature throughout the ages. For example, Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) gives his murders crooked teeth. Crooked teeth are recognized as unattractive even by young children (Zebrowitz, 1997).

Fiodor Mikhailovic Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) also described evil Fyodor with bad teeth: "His countenance at this time bore traces of something that testified unmistakably to the life he had led. Besides the long fleshy bags under his little, always insolent, suspicious and ironical eyes...add to that a long rapacious mouth with full lips, between which could be seen little stumps of black decayed teeth." (Dostoyevsky, 1976, 17).

The reader can also immediately grasp the wickedness of Miss Murdstone's character in Charles Dickens's (1812-1870) *David Copperfield* (1850): "It was Miss Murdstone who had arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she was; dark, like her brother...and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account." (Dickens, 1991, 47).

Similar facial judgements appeared with the introduction of physiognomy where the interest in human faces was quite popular. The term physiognomy comes from the Greek word *fysis*, which can be translated as "nature", and the word *gnómé*, which can be understood as "knowledge", so together, "knowledge of nature".

When it comes to disgust, the most easily recognizable and obvious sign of disgust at the face is the wrinkling of the nose.

I should mention few words about psychological typology of communication. Psychology differs verbal communication, spoken and written language and nonverbal communication.

Meta (paralinguistic) characteristics – tone of voice, ironic colour of voice, accent, etc.

Nonverbal communication – facial expressions (emotions can be easily recognized from some facial expressions (happy / sad, calm / excitement, anxiety / reassurance, etc.); sight (eye contact plays a vital role in communication – eyes convey information and receive it, as well.

The optimal length of eye contacts constitutes about 50% of the communication time; if this time is longer, it signifies excessive dominance, authority, influencing each other, or intimate contact. Shorter eye contact, on the other hand, signifies uncertainty, avoiding the contact, closeness), gestures (movements of the hands, head, legs), haptics (touch), body language (posture - includes tension, release. Identical posture represents cohesion, understanding; different posture means misunderstanding, different opinions), proxemics (distance between people that is distinguished as horizontal – less than 0.5 meter = intimate distance, 0.5 – 2 meters = personal distance, 1 – 10 meters = group distance, 2 – 100 meters = public distance. Vertical distance – if an individual stands over a seated partner, he/she acquires psychological superiority.); territory – (personal space); neurovegetative reactions – (physiologic body response may be manifested by palpitations, fading or blushing, trembling hands, sweating, changes in breathing, etc.); image (style of dressing, make-up, choosing a car, overall lifestyle – practical, luxurious, neglected, etc.); environment (physical space where a man is present may indicate many of his features – self-neglect / pedantry, sense of aesthetics, practicality, etc.); chronemics (structuring communication time).

A man has his nonverbal expressions less under control than the verbal ones; the listener also attributes more importance to nonverbal mediation of information than to the verbal one, whereby the most important are facial expressions (eye contact, face-play), movements of hands and feet, movements and postures of the whole body. (Mikuláščík, 2003)

CONCLUSION

The universal function of disgust is to get away from, block off, or eliminate something offensive, toxic or contaminating (Ekman, 2003). „One evolutionary benefit of disgust is to keep us away from or remove things potentially dangerous or damaging to keep us safe and healthy (e.g., not eating something putrid, staying away from open sores to avoid catching an infection or disease, avoiding interactions with “morally tainted” people)“ (Ekman 2003, p. 66-68). Disgust can be also dangerous. Many societies teach the avoidance of certain groups of people deemed physically or morally disgusting and, thus, can be a driving force in dehumanizing and degrading others, which may reach to superiority, prejudices and other social deviations. On the other hand, disgust can be suppressed:

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are called to reduce the suffering of the loved one (e.g., changing a baby's diaper or taking care of a sick family member). This suspension of disgust establishes intimacy and may even strengthen love and community.“ (Ekman 2003, p.66-68)

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