

Where our emotions come from

For some time psychologists have tried to classify personality types along some universal (culture-independent) lines. They have more or less settled on what are called the "big 5" personality traits, which, it is claimed, people all have in varying degrees. They are generally agreed to be:

- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Five_personality_traits

More recently, there have been various attempts to go deeper and find universal/primordial human (or more broadly, primate/mammal) emotions as well the brain state correlates behind them. While scholars are still a long way from consensus, it is interesting to compare some of the more well-known attempts to do this, even though they are often at different levels of analysis.

We leave aside for the moment the more complex and uniquely human "social" emotions such as envy, pride, ambition, admiration, and embarrassment (see Damasio, http://www.amazon.com/Self-Comes-Mind-Constructing-Conscious/dp/030747495X/ref=sr_1_cc_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1362863925&sr=1-1-catcorr&keywords=self+comes+to+mind).

Paul Ekman first began looking at facial expressions, and concluded that there were universal indicators of basic human emotions across cultures (this conclusion is still controversial). At the same time, evolutionary biologists, looking at the issue more from an evolutionary perspective, came up with the four "fs" (I have found no specific author for this, but it is cited often). Both of these attempts to represent universal human emotions are listed in the table below.

Jaak Panksepp has extended this list to seven, and he and the biologists clearly include what psychologists have called "drives" rather than emotions (e.g. sleep/hunger/sex). But Panksepp has done brain imaging studies as well to try to locate some of what he calls "primordial" emotions in various places (and more importantly, with various patterns of connections) within the brain. Again see the table below.

Clearly the first two items in the table below line up quite well, and to some degree so do the next two (though play also correlates with happiness as well as does lust, and feeding/seeking does not really have a facial expression correlate as such). The others do not seem to line up with each other at all.

But it is disgust that stands out in this crowd. While psychologists and neuroscientists agree that disgust is universal (and neurologically quite basic via the smell sense), they also agree in general that the application of disgust to objects is quite variable across cultures, and to a great extent is learned.

Once we realize that moral purity is mapped from food purity/contamination, and that sensitivity to disgust varies both across individuals and across cultures/groups (which pick out different things to be disgusted about), we can see how intricately connected to disgust (and mostly inaccessible to conscious reflection) our intuitions about many aspects of what we consider moral and culturally appropriate behavior are. These attitudes form an integral part of our personal and social identity, which in turn guide us in our negotiation of meaning at all levels.

Paul Ekman - six "universal" facial expressions	The Four "fs"	Jaak Panksepp - seven "primal" emotions
Anger	Fighting	Rage
Fear	Fleeing	Fear
Surprise	Feeding	Seeking
Happiness	Reproduction	Lust
Sadness		Care
Disgust		Panic
		Play

Ekman: <http://www.paulekman.com/> (look at DO WE ALL HAVE THE SAME BASIC EMOTIONS? at page bottom on this site)

Four "fs": [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Fs_\(evolution\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Fs_(evolution))

Panksepp: <http://discovermagazine.com/2012/may/11-jaak-panksepp-rat-tickler-found-humans-7-primal-emotions#.UTEBODDvt8E>