Introduction

Charles Darwin did not have a theory of emotion – of the subjective feelings we call "anger," "fear," and "sadness." However, he developed the first evolutionary theory of emotional expression – of the smiles, pouts, and frowns that express subjective feelings. He discovered that some facial expressions of emotion are universal, and he theorized that these expressions evolved long ago to help our ancestors survive and reproduce. An expression of anger, for instance, signals one's willingness to fight, which may intimidate rivals into making concessions. Darwin's prescient theory paved the way for basic emotions theory, one of the dominant paradigms in contemporary emotions research.

This story has been told many times. Rather, this *myth* has been told many times. The story presented in the preceding paragraph is entirely incorrect. Every sentence is false.

Darwin did, in fact, have a theory of emotion. Inspired by the philosopher David Hartley, he believed that emotions are "trains" of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, which have been joined together through past associations. Fear is the mind's simulation of the mental states and behaviors that our ancestors experienced in the face of danger. Sadness is a train of painful associations, derived from our ancestors' experience of loss, activated by our own experience of loss. According to Darwin, our emotions are lingering, transgenerational recollections of formative experiences – apparitions of the past, manifested in the present.

Darwin did believe that some facial expressions are universal, but he certainly did not "discover" this fact, given that most of his predecessors and contemporaries assumed it to be true. For example, his creationist adversaries believed that God endowed all humans (and some domesticated animals) with a universal language of emotion to facilitate communication. Even dyed-in-the-wool empiricists, who insisted that all complex mental states are learned, posited universal emotions, with universal

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expressions, based on universal childhood experiences. Few in Darwin's day doubted the universality of at least some emotional expressions.

Darwin was not even the first to propose an evolutionary theory of these expressions. The philosopher Herbert Spencer beat him to it. According to Spencer, emotional expressions are indeed adaptations, which helped our ancestors to survive and reproduce. But according to Darwin, many expressions serve no purpose whatsoever. Some may be adaptations (useful traits). But others are vestiges (once but no longer useful traits). And still others are spandrels (byproducts of other useful traits). Spencer emphasized the use*ful*ness of expressions; Darwin instead emphasized their use*less*ness.

Moreover, Darwin went out of his way to deny that expressions evolved as signals for communication. You can see a scowl and infer that the person is angry and willing to fight, but the person isn't scowling for the sake of showing you that they are angry or willing to fight. Darwin's expressions are "cues" (things that just happen to convey information) as opposed to "signals" (things that were naturally or conventionally selected to convey information).

Finally, Darwin's theory has little in common with modern basic emotions theory. If anything, Darwin's theory presages psychological constructionism, another contemporary paradigm that rejects the central tenets of basic emotions theory. For Darwin, as for psychological constructionists, the things we call "emotions" are simply the patterns that emerge from the complex interplay of simpler psychological processes. Emotion types like sadness, anger, and fear exist in our minds, but not in nature. They are useful schemas for explaining and predicting social behavior in real time, but not rigorous or reliable enough to serve as scientific categories.

The aim of this book is to set the story straight – to present Charles Darwin's fascinating but forgotten philosophy of emotion. Chapter 1 introduces Darwin's published book on emotional expression, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). Chapter 2 delves into Darwin's philosophical influences, the associationists of the Enlightenment. Chapter 3 shows that Darwin developed the central ideas of *Expression* in dialogue with these philosophers. Chapters 4 and 5 detail Darwin's associationist theories of emotions and emotional expressions, respectively. Finally, Chapter 6 explains why Darwin's theory was forgotten – and why it should be remembered.

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