

Notes on Jonathan Haidt, The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment. *Psychological Review* 108.4 (2001): 814-834.

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PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS (JP)

Moral psychology (description or "is"): description of the mental life* of people faced with moral decisions.

- Mental life = actions and passions; reasoning and emotions. Can't just be "mental acts" of people, because H will insist on role of emotions, which are passive, in the sense they come over the subject, they move the subject.
- Emotions or "affects" have been focus of renewed interest in psych and phil, after long focus on reason alone. Can be separated into "basic emotions" (rage, fear, sadness, joy) and "higher" or "social" emotions (shame, guilt, love, hate, resentment, etc.). Emotions traditionally seen as "lower," "animal," "childish," etc.

Moral philosophy (prescription or "ought"): principles by which people should act when faced with moral decisions.

- Deontology: (intentions): Kant: categorical imperative. Two formulations. 1) act so that the maxim of your action can be a universal law. 2) Treat moral agents as ends, not means.
- Utilitarianism: (consequences): Mill: act so that your acts (or the rules by which you derive your acts) create the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Happiness = (refined) pleasure and absence of pain.
- Virtue theory: (character): Aristotle: act so that you develop your character leading to a flourishing life.
- Sentimentalism: (affects): Hume: "reason is the slave of the passions"; "there's no reason to prefer the destruction of the world to the pricking of my little finger." Complete rationality is like psychopathy (sets up Damasio book).

Relation of moral philosophy and moral psychology: two slogans

- "can't derive ought from is" (might be seen as allowing moral philosophers to ignore moral psychology)
- But also: "ought implies can" (indicates that a dialogue between the two is needed)

Note the scope of Haidt's article: not just standard moral psychology (lab work; interviews), but also evolutionary biology, primatology (ethology), developmental neurobiology and psychology, neuroscience, and anthropology.

HAIDT

INTRODUCTION

Moral psych has long been rationalist (you are like a judge): moral judgments come from reasoning.

He proposes "social intuitionist" model (you are like a lawyer): moral judgments come from intuitions; reasoning is (mostly) ex post facto and directed at the intuitions / judgments of other people (who have asked you for an explanation or whom you wish to sway). Because intuitions come first, you won't convince someone by reason out of a strong intuition. But you can hope to provoke a different intuition in them that clashes with their previous intuition, and hence prompt a reshuffling of their affective structure (my term).

HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

Behaviorism focused just on input – output functions. Mind was a "black box." Morality studied in terms of social structure of reward and punishment.

JP: Note the connection here between behaviorism and Rational Choice Theory after Satz and Frerejohn. (Rational Choice and Social Theory. The Journal of Philosophy 91.2 (1994): 71-87.) RCT once posited a rational agent inside our heads – "homo economicus." But Satz and Frerejohn said let's just study social conditions that produce behavior *as if* there were a rational agent inside our heads. For me, this means you have to produce extreme social conditions of neo-liberalism to break natural solidarity. Strong position here taken by Klein in *Shock Doctrine*.

Kohlberg and cognitive revolution. Focus on cognitive development so that conscious language-based reasoning leading to moral judgment is mature stage.

SOCIAL INTUITIONIST MODEL

Definitions:

1. Moral judgment: "evaluation (good vs bad) of actions or character of a person that are made with respect to a set of virtues [why not also "acts"?] held to be obligatory by a culture or sub-culture."
2. Moral reasoning: "conscious mental activity that consists of transforming given information about people in order to reach a moral judgment.... Intentional, effortful, and controllable ... aware."
3. Moral intuition: "sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), w/o any conscious awareness of having gone through steps ... Akin to aesthetic judgment ..."

Links:

1. Intuitive judgment
2. Post-hoc reasoning (to support your intuition)
3. Reasoned persuasion (justifying your position to others: pathetic appeal of rhetoric: produce a new intuition in others)
4. Social persuasion (moral judgments of others can affect your judgment)
5. Reasoned judgment (over-riding your intuition, when it is weak and cognition is strong)
6. Private reflection (by thinking things over / role-playing, you can provoke a new intuition in yourself, producing a conflict of intuitions that needs to be resolved by going with strongest intuition or by letting reason decide).

Four reasons to doubt causal importance of reason

1. Dual process problem (intuition and reason)
 - a. Automatic / affective evaluation: first in phylogeny / ontogeny. Here we see embodied sense-making (Jonas / Varela). Mind in life school. Three-fold sense: sensibility / openness; signification / valuing; direction / movement.
 - b. Automatic moral judgment: attitudes, persuasion findings. Note important point on 820 whereby "standard moral judgment interviews may therefore create an unusually reasoned form of moral judgment." (talking to a stranger about a hypothetical situation: but real life moral judgment occurs on the spot, in the heat of the moment, with people you care about right in front of you, etc.)
2. Motivated reasoning problem
 - a. Relatedness motives (impression management and smooth interaction w/ others)
 - b. Coherence motives (reduce cognitive dissonance / threats to validity of worldview / "terror management")
3. Post hoc problem ("illusion of objective reasoning")
 - a. Search for plausible theories to explain action: "a priori causal theories" (culturally supplied explanations): connection with narrative position in Theory of Mind (Hutto). Previous studies of moral reasoning as "ethnography of the a priori moral theories held by various communities and age groups" (822). See note at bottom of 822 on RCT / self-interest as widespread American theory of behavior.
 - b. Illusions of moral judgment
 - i. Wag the dog illusion: "we believe our own moral judgment (the dog) is driven by our own moral reasoning."

- ii. Wag the other dog's tail: "we expect the rebuttal of an opponent's argument to change the opponent's mind. Such a belief is like thinking that forcing a dog's tail to wag by moving it with your hand will make the dog happy."

"naïve realism People think that they see the world as it is whereas their opponents in a moral dispute are biased by ideology and self-interest."

"Bitterness, futility, and self-righteousness of most moral arguments ... both sides believe that their positions are based on reasoning about the facts and the issues involved (wag the dog illusion). Both sides present what they take to be excellent arguments in support of their positions. Both sides expect the other side to be responsive to such reasons (wag the other dog's tail illusion). When the other side fails to be affected by such good reasons, each side concludes that the other side must be closed minded or insincere."

"Moral arguments are therefore like shadow-boxing matches: Each contestant lands heavy blows to the opponent's shadow, then wonders why she doesn't fall down."

JP: I really love this section. When I think back on all the bitter, futile and self-righteous moral / political arguments in which I've engaged, I realize with chagrin just how much these descriptions fit real life. I mean, seriously, have you ever convinced someone by argumentation to abandon a deeply-held position? The key has to be the pathetic appeal in rhetoric: how do you change people's intuitions, and then back off and give them time to stew on it a bit?

- 4. Action problem: moral action covaries with moral emotion rather than with moral reasoning.
 - a. Weak link between moral reasoning and moral action: hot and cool systems of willpower as resistance to temptation. Hot = quick emotional processing (amygdala-based emotional memory) (LeDoux). Cool system = complex / episodic representation (hippocampal memory and frontal lobe planning). With development, the cool system can block the hot system's impulses. Improved behavior of smart kids not from their reasoning, but because of better cool system of self-regulation ("emotional intelligence"). Moral reasoning predicts refraining from delinquency ("negative morality"), but not so much with helping people ("positive morality").
 - b. Strong link between moral emotions and moral action. Psychopaths. (cf. Damasio). Empathy – altruism. (Remember, here we must distinguish proximal psych explanations from [alleged] ultimate genetic explanations – kin selection, reciprocal altruism, etc. Joyce will deal with this in detail.)

MECHANISM OF INTUITION

1. Gut feelings in the mind: Damasio and somatic marker hypothesis.
2. Metaphor and embodiment: Lakoff and Johnson: embodied cognition: embodied metaphors (e.g., contamination / purity; high / low; light / dark). "Moral intuition appears to be automatic output of an underlying, largely unconscious set of interlinked moral concepts." Moral concepts: innate basis (primate prosociality) and extended by embodied metaphors and their entailments. (Lakoff and framing: find right metaphor to provoke intuition. Again, pathetic appeal in rhetoric.)

ORIGIN OF INTUITIONS

1. Primate protomorality: De Waal: prescriptive rules (active reinforcement by others). Fiske and universal modes of social cognition: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching (these found in primates), and market pricing (only in humans). Continuity vs discontinuity issue. Human uniqueness in wide-spread third-party norm enforcement. Dunbar and language / gossip connection (but see also Deacon and Machiavellians).
2. Externalization: the question is not how do norms get inside, but how do they emerge?

DEVELOPMENT OF INTUITIONS

1. Selective loss: specialization among three subsets: autonomy, community, divinity. Depends on high neural plasticity windows, which are documented for many other factors.
2. Immersion in custom complexes: "complex web of explicit and implicit sensory and propositional, affective, cognitive, and motoric knowledge." ("affective" and "motoric" knowledge here = how to or know how, vs. know that). Embodiment of culture produces self-evidence of intuition (see references to neuroscience on 828). Pathos before logos. Cultural politics, all the way back to Plato. Imitation is key. "Cultural knowledge gets in largely through non-verbal and nonconscious means, but it gets out through conscious verbal communication."
3. Peer socialization.

INTEGRATING RATIONALISM AND INTUITIONISM

"treat moral judgment style as an aspect of culture and try to create a culture that fosters a more balanced, reflective, and fair-minded style of judgment." (Enacting democracy.)

TESTING THE SOCIAL INTUITIONIST MODEL

Ecological validity of testing is key.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF HAIDT'S ARTICLE (JP)

1. Shift of focus in moral psychology from reasoning capacities of adults to their embodied intuitions.
2. But also a shift from adults to children, specifically the embodiment of culture via imitation and hence the embodiment of culturally specific motor schemas, embodied metaphors, etc., as the source of intuitions. This means physical / somatic cultural politics, or what Plato called "musikē" or what Bourdieu called the embodiment of "habitus" or what I call "political physiology" or the study of "bodies politic." The importance of this shift cannot be overestimated. It means that the focus on linguaform rules of culture, which might be appropriate for 3rd party description of behavioral patterns, is misplaced when used to describe the genesis of moral intuitions / judgment.
3. So if we want to analyze political intuitions in contemporary America, we have to look to the embodiment of authoritarian intuitions via immersion in authoritarian practices. Think of the 3 golden rules of American education: sit down, shut up, and obey. Think of dictator sports coaches, and the way sports journalists are ever-ready with their trope of "the inmates are running the asylum" whenever any athlete stands up to a coach, no matter how stupid the coach may be (e.g., Hope Solo vs Greg Ryan at the 2007 Women's Soccer World Cup). Think of work spaces!
4. And so we also have to think about how to create practices that allow the embodiment democratic values and hence the development of democratic intuitions as well. Worker collectives and workplace democracy: what a collectivist anarchism would foster. (Need to read more Kropotkin!)
5. Thus we can't cede anti-state thought to the libertarians, especially since so much of what passes for "libertarianism" ends up simply enhancing corporate power. We have to hold the libertarians to the standard that socialists were held to in the Cold War: we have to make them account for "actually existing libertarianism," e.g., the use of anti-state slogans and policies (de-regulation / privatization) by authoritarian corporatists like the Republicans, or by enlightened corporatists, like the Democrats.
6. In other words, we can't cede the ground of the "culture wars" to the right. We have to thematize culture for what it is: the shaping of bodies politic and hence the source of moral / political intuitions. That means we can't adopt a knee-jerk liberalism about "the private sphere." So, for instance, we need to study careful Susan Hurley's work on media violence: given the importance of bodily practice in shaping intuition, why not treat first-person shooter games as drugs, rather than as "speech"?