

# Lecture 03 Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil?

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## 1. Moral Dumbfounding

*Moral dumbfounding* is ‘the stubborn and puzzled maintenance of a judgment without supporting reasons’ (Haidt et al. 2000, p. 1).

Another definition: ‘*Moral dumbfounding* occurs when you make an ethical judgement but either cannot provide reasons or provide reasons that are ‘only weakly associated’ with your judgement’ (Dwyer 2009).

### 1.1. Dumbfounding Scenarios

‘(Incest) depicts consensual incest between two adult siblings, and [...] (Cannibal) depicts a woman cooking and eating a piece of flesh from a human cadaver donated for research to the medical school pathology lab at which she works. These stories were ... were carefully written to be harmless’ (Haidt et al. 2000).

<sup>1</sup> In fact Haidt’s view is more interesting. Compare Haidt & Bjorklund (2008, p. 181): ‘Moral discussion is a kind of distributed reasoning, and moral claims and justifications have important effects on individuals and societies’. Yet they go on to write that ‘moral reasoning is an effortful process (as opposed to an automatic process), usually engaged in after a moral judgment is made, in which a person searches for arguments that will support an already-made judgment’ (Haidt & Bjorklund 2008, p. 189).

### 1.2. An Effect of Cognitive Load?

‘In Study 2 [which is not reported in the draft] we repeated the basic design while exposing half of the subjects to a cognitive load—an attention task that took up some of their conscious mental work space—and found that this load increased the level of moral dumbfounding without changing subjects’ judgments or their level of persuadability’ (Haidt & Bjorklund 2008, p. 198).

### 1.3. An Attempted Replication

‘a definitionally pristine bout of MD is likely to be an extraordinarily rare find, one featuring a person who doggedly and decisively condemns the very same act that she has no prior normative reasons to dislike’ (Royzman et al. 2015, p. 311)

‘3 of [...] 14 individuals [without supporting reasons] disapproved of the siblings having sex and only 1 of 3 (1.9and puzzled” manner.’ (Royzman et al. 2015, p. 309)

## 2. A Language Analogy: Dwyer’s Argument

‘linguistics—a domain in which ordinary human beings are also famously dumbfounded.’ (Dwyer

2009, p. 279)

‘Moral Dumbfounding suggests two desiderata for an adequate account of moral judgment; namely, it:

(a) must not entail what is patently false, namely, that such judgments are the conclusions of explicitly represented syllogisms, one or more premises of which are moral principles, that ordinary folk can articulate, and

(b) must accommodate subjects’ grasp of the structure of the scenes they evaluate.’

‘The Linguistic Analogy, which [...] holds that [ethical] judgments are reflective of the structure of the Moral Faculty, satisfies these desiderata’ (Dwyer 2009, p. 294).

### 2.1. A Role for Reasoning?

Dwyer’s Language Analogy seems to suggest that reasoning plays a little role in making ethical judgements as it does in making judgement of syntacticality. Is this correct? What is the role of reasoning in moral judgement?

Some appear to have suggested that moral reasoning merely serves to confirm prior intuitions, special cases aside (Greene 2007; Haidt 2001).<sup>1</sup> Opposing these views, Hindriks (2015) argues that in ordinary cases of moral disengagement, moral reasoning provides anticipatory rationalization.

‘*Moral disengagement* occurs in situations in which someone is tempted to flout his own moral standards, and thereby to frustrate his desire to maintain self-consistency’ (Hindriks 2015, p. 243).

On reasoning, see further Paxton et al. (2012) (not covered in lectures).

## 2.2. More on Linguistic Analogies

(not covered in lectures): ‘the issues [a linguistic] analogy raises for moral theory are (1) whether the useful unit of analysis for moral theory is an individual’s I-grammar, in contrast, for example, with the moral conventions of a group; (2) whether and how such a moral grammar might associate structural descriptions of actions, situations, etc. with normative assessments; (3) whether and how the rules of such a moral grammar might involve recursive embedding of normative assessments; and (4) whether it is useful to distinguish moral ‘competence’ from moral ‘performance,’ using these terms in the technical senses employed in linguistic theory’ (Roedder & Harman 2010, p. 283).

Dupoux & Jacob (2007) provide further objections to the Linguistic Analogy. Dwyer & Hauser (2008) reply, and Dupoux & Jacob (2008) reply to the reply.

## 3. Dual Process Theories

*Dual Process Theory of Ethical Abilities (core part)*: Two (or more) ethical processes are distinct: the conditions which influence whether they occur, and which outputs they generate, do not completely overlap.

### 3.1. Dilemma

‘You are part of a group of ecologists who live in a remote stretch of jungle. The entire group, which includes eight children, has been taken hostage by a group of paramilitary terrorists. One of the terrorists takes a liking to you. He informs you that his leader intends to kill you and the rest of the hostages the following morning.

‘He is willing to help you and the children escape, but as an act of good faith he wants you to kill one of your fellow hostages whom he does not like. If you refuse his offer all the hostages including the children and yourself will die. If you accept his offer then the others will die in the morning but you and the eight children will escape.

‘Would you kill one of your fellow hostages in

order to escape from the terrorists and save the lives of the eight children?’ (Koenigs et al. 2007)

### 3.2. Dual Process Elaborations

Terminology: One process is *faster* than another if it makes fewer demands on scarce cognitive resources such as attention, inhibitory control and working memory.

A response is *consequentialist* if it accords with a simple consequentialist theory. (For example, affirming that one person should be killed to save five would be a ‘consequentialist response’.)

To generate predictions, the core dual process theory can be elaborated by making further assumptions:

1. One process is faster than the other.
2. The slower process is responsible for consequentialist responses; the faster for other responses.

### 3.3. Cognitive Load

Prediction: Increasing cognitive load will selectively slow consequentialist responses (Greene et al. 2008).

### 3.4. Time Pressure

Prediction: Limiting the time available to make a decision will reduce consequentialist responses.

‘The model detected a significant effect of time pressure,  $p = .03$  (see Table 1), suggesting that the slope of utilitarian responses was steeper for participants under time pressure. [...] participants under time pressure gave less utilitarian responses than control participants to scenarios featuring low kill–save ratios, but reached the same rates of utilitarian responses for the highest kill–save ratios’ (Trémolière & Bonnefon 2014, p. 927). (For later: Gawronski et al. (2018, p. 1006) defend an alternative interpretation of the same findings.)

## 4. Dual Process Theories Meet the Puzzles

### 4.1. The Puzzles

[*emotion puzzle*] Why do feelings of disgust influence unreflective moral judgements? (And why do we feel disgust in response to moral transgressions?)

[*structure puzzle*] Why do patterns in humans’ unreflective ethical judgements reflect legal principles they are unaware of?

[*dumbfounding puzzle*] Why are ethical judgements sometimes, but not always, a conse-

quences of reasoning from known principles?

### 4.2. A Solution?

Cushman et al. (2010, p. 48) propose ‘a dual-process approach in which moral judgment is the product of both intuitive and rational psychological processes, and it is the product of what are conventionally thought of as ‘affective’ and ‘cognitive’ mechanisms.’

### 4.3. Note: Two-System vs Dual Process

‘We use the term “system” only as a label for collections of cognitive processes that can be distinguished by their speed, their controllability, and the contents on which they operate’ (Kahneman & Frederick 2005, p. 267).

## 5. Dual Process Theories: the Process Dissociation Approach

Aim: distinguish the contribution of two causal factors to a single response.

The process dissociation approach originates in memory research (Jacoby 1991). In this case, the approach is applied to distinguish the contributions of consequentialist and deontological considerations (Conway & Gawronski 2013).

### 5.1. Dilemmas

A dilemma is *incongruent* if a simple consequentialist theory would require a response that differs from that required simple deontological theory.

*Incongruent Dilemma* You are the head of a poor household in a developing country. Your crops have failed for the second year in a row, and it appears that you have no way to feed your family. Your sons, ages eight and ten, are too young to go off to the city where there are jobs, but your daughter could fare better. You know a man from your village who lives in the city and who makes sexually explicit films featuring girls such as your daughter. In front of your daughter, he tells you that in one year of working in his studio your daughter could earn enough money to keep your family fed for several growing seasons. Is it appropriate for you to employ your daughter in the pornography industry in order to feed your family?

*Congruent Dilemma* You are the head of a poor household in a developing country. Your sons, ages eight and ten, work on the family farm every day in order to teach them the value of hard work and providing for others. Your daughter, however, cannot work on the farm due to the heavy lifting required. You worry that she will not learn the value of money if she does not work. You know a man from your village who lives in the city and who makes sexually

explicit films featuring girls such as your daughter. In front of your daughter, he tells you that in one year of working in his studio your daughter could earn enough money to keep your family fed for several growing seasons. Is it appropriate for you to employ your daughter in the pornography industry in order to teach her the value of money?

## 5.2. Results

‘cognitive load selectively reduced utilitarian inclinations while leaving deontological inclinations unaffected’ (Conway & Gawronski 2013, Study 2).

‘enhanced empathic concern selectively increased deontological inclinations, whereas utilitarian inclinations remained unaffected’ (Conway & Gawronski 2013, Study 3).

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