Lecture 09: Moral Psychology

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1. Origins of Moral Psychology

moral sense: a 'tendency to see certain actions and individuals as right, good, and deserving of reward, and others as wrong, bad, and deserving of punishment' (Hamlin 2013, p. 186).

Hamlin's three requirements for moral sense:

1. prosociality (helpfulness towards others)

2. discrimination between pro- and anti-social acts

3. retribution

'infants are making relatively complex and sophisticated social judgments in the first year of life. They not only evaluate others based on the local valence of their behavior, they are also sensitive to the global context in which these behaviors occur. During the second year, young toddlers direct their own valenced acts toward appropriate targets.' (Hamlin et al. 2011, p. 19933)

'developmental research supports the claim that at least some aspects of human morality are innate. From extremely early in life, human infants show morally relevant motivations and evaluations—ones that are mentalistic, are nuanced, and do not appear to stem from socialization or morally specific experience' (Hamlin 2013, p. 191).

1.1. Poverty of stimulus arguments

How do poverty of stimulus arguments work? See Pullum & Scholz (2002).

1. Human infants acquire X.

2. To acquire X by data-driven learning you'd need this Crucial Evidence.

3. But infants lack this Crucial Evidence for X.

4. So human infants do not acquire X by data-driven learning.

5. But all acquisition is either data-driven or innately-primed learning.

6. So human infants acquire X by innately-primed learning .

'the APS [argument from the poverty of stimulus] still awaits even a single good supporting example' (Pullum & Scholz 2002, p. 47)

2. Comparisons between Four Theories

In order of appearance:

– the Affect Heuristic (Sinnott-Armstrong et al. 2010)

– various Linguistic Analogies (Mikhail 2007, 2014; Dwyer 2009)

– Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al. 2009, 2019)

– Dual Process Theories (Greene 2014; Cushman et al. 2010)

3. Conclusion: Why Investigate Moral Psychology?

3.1. Understanding human sociality

'humans (both individually and as a species) develop morality because it is required for cooperative systems to flourish' (Hamlin 2015, p. 108).

'Humans are [...] adapted [...] to live in morally structured communities' thanks in part to 'the capacity to operate systems of moralistic punishment' and susceptibility 'to moral suasion' (Richerson & Boyd 1999, p. 257).

'pathogens are among the principle existential threats to organisms, so those who could best

avoid pathogens would have enhanced evolutionary fitness. Van Vugt and Park contend that human groups develop unique practices for reducing pathogen exposure—particularly in how they prepare their foods and maintain their hygiene. When groups are exposed to the practices of a foreign culture, they may perceive its members as especially likely to carry pathogens that may contaminate one's ingroup' (Graham et al. 2013, p. 93).

'When controlling for GDP per capita, the pattern of correlations between historical pathogen prevalence and endorsement of moral foundations remained largely unchanged; however, contemporary pathogen prevalence was not significantly correlated with any of the moral foundations' (van Leeuwen et al. 2012).

3.2. Effecting Political Change

'The moral framing of climate change has typically focused on only the first two values: harm to present and future generations and the unfairness of the distribution of burdens caused by climate change. As a result, the justification for action on climate change holds less moral priority for conservatives than liberals' (Markowitz & Shariff 2012, p. 244)

'We tested whether the effects of political identity persisted after partialing out variation in moral relevance ratings for other demographic variables. We created a model representing the five foundations as latent factors measured by three manifest variables each, simultaneously predicted by political identity and four covariates: age, gender, education level, and income. [...] Including the covariates, political identity still predicted all five foundations in the predicted direction [...]. Political identity was the key explanatory variable: It was the only consistent significant predictor [...] for all five foundations' (Graham et al. 2009, p. 1032)

3.2.1. Objections

'the five-factor model of MFQ revealed a good fit to the data on both WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples. Besides, the five-factor model yielded a better fit to the data as compared to the two-factor model of MFQ. Measurement invariance test across samples validated factor structure for the five-factor model, yet a comparison of samples provided metric non-invariance implying that item loadings are different across groups [...] although the same statements tap into the same moral foundations in each case, the strength of the link between the statements and the foundations were different in WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultures' (Doğruyol et al. 2019).

'across subscales, there were problems with scalar invariance, which suggests that researchers may need to carefully consider whether this scale is working similarly across groups before conducting mean comparisons'

(Davis et al. 2016, p. e27)

'entire literatures can develop on the basis of faulty measurement assumptions.' (Davis et al. 2017, p. 128)

3.3. Discovering Ethical Principles?

Humans lack direct insight into moral properties (Sinnott-Armstrong et al. 2010)

Intuitions cannot be used to counterexample theories (Sinnott-Armstrong et al. 2010)

Intuitions are unreliable in unfamiliar* situations (Greene 2014, p. 715)

'Let us define unfamiliar* problems as ones with which we have inadequate evolutionary, cultural, or personal experience.' (Greene 2014, p. 714)

Philosophers, including Kant, do not use reason to figure out what is right or wrong, but 'primarily to justify and organize their preexising intuitive conclusions' (Greene 2014, p. 718)

'the sprouts are incipient tendencies to act, feel, desire, perceive, and think in virtuous ways. Each sprout corresponds to one of Mencius' four cardinal virtues: (benevolence), (righteousness), (propriety), and (wisdom). Even in the uncultivated person, these sprouts are active. They manifest themselves, from time to time, in virtuous reactions to certain situations' (Norden 2002, pp. 46–7)

'characteristic of each sprout is a particular set of emotions or attitudes' (Norden 2002, p. 74)

'one may think of moral theory at first [...] as the attempt to describe our moral capacity [...] what is required is a formulation of a set of principles which, when conjoined to our beliefs and knowledge of the circumstances, would lead us to make these judgments with their supporting reasons were we to apply these principles conscientiously and intelligently' (Rawls 1999, p. 41).

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