

Moral Psychology vs Consequentialism?

s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

1. Introduction

Moral psychology is the study of psychological aspects of ethical abilities.

Questions for this course:

1. What ethical abilities do humans have? What states and processes underpin them?
2. What, if anything, do discoveries about ethical abilities imply about ethics?

On 2: ‘Science can advance ethics by revealing the hidden inner workings of our moral judgments, especially the ones we make intuitively. Once those inner workings are revealed we may have less confidence in some of [...] the ethical theories that are explicitly or implicitly based on them’ (Greene 2014, pp. 695–6).

2. Puzzle 1

Why do people tend to respond differently in Trolley and Transplant? (And, when given both, why do they tend to respond consistently when Transplant comes first?)

Trolley A runaway trolley is about to run over and kill five people. You can hit a switch that will divert the trolley onto a different set of tracks

where it will kill only one. Is it okay to hit the switch?

Transplant Five people are going to die but you can save them all by cutting up one healthy person and distributing her organs. Is it ok to cut her up?

3. 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).

3.1. 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).

3.2. 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).

3.3. 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)

4. Puzzle 2

Why are ethical judgements sometimes, but not always, a consequences of reasoning from known principles?

5. Emotions

Hypothesis: Emotion drives unreflective ethical judgements.

Prediction: Manipulating subjects' emotions will influence their unreflective ethical judgements.

Evidence: 'For high-PBC [Private Body Consciousness] (but not low-PBC) people, our disgust manipulations increased the severity of moral condemnation relative to the neutral conditions' (Schnall et al. 2008, p. 1105)

Four conclusions:

1. 'the effect of disgust applies regardless of whether the action to be judged is itself disgusting.
2. disgust influenced moral, but not additional nonmoral, judgments.
3. because the effect occurred most strongly for people who were sensitive to their own bodily cues, the results appear to concern feelings of disgust rather than merely the primed concept of disgust.
4. induced sadness did not have similar effects' (Schnall et al. 2008, pp. 1105–6).

6. 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.

6.1. 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)

6.2. 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.

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.'

6.3. Cognitive Load

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

6.4. 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.)

6.5. 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).

7. Consequences for ethics?

‘genetic transmission, cultural transmission, and learning from personal experience [...] are the only mechanisms known to endow [...] automatic [...] processes with the information they need to function well’ (Greene 2014, p. 714)

unfamiliar problems* = ‘ones with which we have inadequate evolutionary, cultural, or personal experience’

‘it would be a cognitive miracle if we had reliably

good moral instincts about unfamiliar* moral problems’ (Greene 2014, p. 715).

‘The *No Cognitive Miracles Principle*: When we are dealing with unfamiliar* moral problems, we ought to rely less on [...] automatic emotional responses and more on [...] conscious, controlled reasoning, lest we bank on cognitive miracles’ (Greene 2014, p. 715).

References

Cushman, F., Young, L., & Greene, J. D. (2010). Multi-system moral psychology. In J. M. Doris, M. P. R. Group, et al. (Eds.), *The moral psychology handbook* (pp. 47–71). Oxford: OUP.

Dwyer, S. (2009). Moral Dumbfounding and the Linguistic Analogy: Methodological Implications for the Study of Moral Judgment. *Mind & Language*, 24(3), 274–296.

Gawronski, B., Conway, P., Armstrong, J., Friesdorf, R., & Hütter, M. (2018). Effects of incidental emotions on moral dilemma judgments: An analysis using the CNI model. *Emotion*, 18(7), 989–1008.

Greene, J. D. (2014). Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics. *Ethics*, 124(4), 695–726.

Greene, J. D., Morelli, S. A., Lowenberg, K., Nystrom, L. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2008). Cognitive load selectively interferes with utilitarian moral judgment. *Cognition*, 107(3), 1144–1154.

Haidt, J. & Bjorklund, F. (2008). Social intuitionists answer six questions about moral psychology. In W. Sinnott-Armstrong (Ed.), *Moral Psychology, Vol 2: The Cognitive*

Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity chapter 4, (pp. 181–217). Cambridge, Mass: MIT press.

Haidt, J., Bjorklund, F., & Murphy, S. (2000). Moral dumbfounding: When intuition finds no reason.

Kahneman, D. & Frederick, S. (2005). A model of heuristic judgment. In K. J. Holyoak & R. G. Morrison (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of thinking and reasoning* (pp. 267–293). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koenigs, M., Young, L., Adolphs, R., Tranel, D., Cushman, F., Hauser, M., & Damasio, A. (2007). Damage to the prefrontal cortex increases utilitarian moral judgements. *Nature; London*, 446(7138), 908–11.

Royzman, E. B., Kim, K., & Leeman, R. F. (2015). The curious tale of julie and mark: unraveling the moral dumbfounding effect. *Judgment & Decision Making*, 10(4).

Schnall, S., Haidt, J., Clore, G. L., & Jordan, A. H. (2008). Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(8), 1096–1109.

Trémolière, B. & Bonnefon, J.-F. (2014). Efficient Kill–Save Ratios Ease Up the Cognitive Demands on Counterintuitive Moral Utilitarianism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 124(3), 379–384.