

## V Aspects of our Moral Sensibility

### Tomasello's *Why We Cooperate*

Basic idea: we are born as natural cooperators; we then come to refine that into something that is more reciprocal.

Evidence for natural cooperation:

*Helping* At 18 months, children will help an adult; this behaviour is cross cultural, is shared with chimpanzees. Reward will actually diminish helping behaviour, suggesting that it is intrinsically motivated (some background here: Deci and Ryan on intrinsic motivation; the theory of cognitive dissonance.) In contrast, empathy increases the behaviour. Children's pointing seems to involve theorizing about what the other person wants: when asked to fetch the battery at 20 months, subjects fetched the further battery, not the one that was already there. (Background here: ascription of desires; ignorance; false belief.) Compare Hamlin, Wynn and Bloom: children less than a year old expect puppets to prefer other puppets that help them over those that hinder them; and they prefer to play with the helper puppets.

*Informing* At 12 months infants will point to a stapler to show an adult where it is. Other primates very rarely point, and then only with humans and as an imperative.

*Sharing* Children are not so good at this. But they will provide for others when there is no cost to themselves, unlike chimpanzees: the pull board experiment with chimps and children of 25 months; children pull to help others, chimps pull randomly. (NB: this looks rather more like helping than sharing.)

Evidence for later reciprocation:

(i) from around the age of 3, children help and share more if the others reciprocate. Chimpanzees, in contrast, show no obvious sense of fairness: they 'cooperate' in the ultimatum game for the least reward (beware of the early studies here on capuchins).

(ii) at least from the age of 3 children are sensitive to norms, and they are norm enforcers.

Further: non-human primate societies work using kinship relations and direct self-interest; human are involved in mutualism that looks more like a stag hunt than a prisoners' dilemma. That is, there are two dominant strategies—both cooperate or both defect—and cooperation brings a higher pay-off (though you do badly if you cooperate and everyone else defects; then you would do better to defect). Young children positively enjoy cooperation, unlike chimps. Getting ongoing cooperation requires three things: an ability to coordinate; norms, which we have already mentioned; and trust. (Other relevant work here: Tom Tyler's findings that people are much more likely obey the law when they think it is fair and benevolent, even if it harder on them.)

## The Moral/Conventional Distinction

From a young age, (around 3) children start to make distinctions within the norms between those that are moral and those that are conventional. Typical sort of paradigm: take two norms that they endorse: you should say 'excuse me' if you burp at the dinner table; you shouldn't hit younger children; then ask them whether, in a society in which these behaviours were allowed, it would really be ok for them to do them. For examples like the first they say 'yes'; for examples like the second, they say 'no'.

There is some controversy over quite how universal this distinction is; certainly the *content* of what counts as conventional and what counts as moral differs across different societies. (For a brief summary see Kumar 2015) But the following features do seem to group together for the 'moral' cases:

- (1) serious
- (2) general
- (3) authority-independent
- (4) objective

And if told that some of these features obtain, they tend to assume that the others do too.

## Greene on the primacy of reason

Basic idea: in general our behaviour is driven by two systems: fast and slow; Type 1 and Type 2. Compare the automatic and manual controls on a camera.

In the case of ethics, Greene argues, very roughly, Type 1 (fast) thinking is deontological; Type 2 (slow) is consequentialist. Type 1 makes use of emotional systems; Type 2 makes use of rational systems. Arguments for this: reaction times; time pressure; scanning.

Type 2 gets the moral facts right; ultimately consequentialism is true; but deontology gives us good rules of thumb. (So Greene has something in common with Kant; and something against him.)

Concerns:

(i) how does the Type1/Type 2 distinction relate to the distinction between rational and emotional responses?

(i) is the Type 2 approach always more consequentialist? Kant seems like a very Type 2 type.

(ii) why favour the deliberative? Perhaps we can grasp truths using affective responses or other Type 1 responses that we cannot grasp using purely deliberative rational processes. Greene himself has a study showing that people are more likely to defect on a prisoners' dilemma if given more time.

## Haidt on the primacy of emotion

Basic idea: in general we need affective responses to navigate the world; compare what happens with ‘acquired sociopathy’. In the moral sphere we are primarily driven by affective responses; witness the moral dumbfounding that occurs when we try to give justifications. Reasoning follows the affective responses, and it is typically involved in rationalizing them. Just occasionally the rational will lead us to revise our initial affective responses: reactions to incest cases after a two minute break. (Beware here: Haidt calls the initial affective response the *intuition*; philosophers are likely to think that the revision is based on our moral intuitions.)

These affective moral responses are many. They can’t be reduced to a single principle. Haidt suggests five:

- care/harm;
- fairness/cheating;
- loyalty/betrayal;
- authority/subversion;
- sanctity/degradation.

He thinks these are innate, but he has, like most psychologists these days, a rather sophisticated view of innateness: not something that is unchangeable, but ‘organized in advance of experience’. It’s not altogether clear why he picks on these five.

## Why privilege one (emotional/rational/Type 1/Type 2) over the other?

Mightn’t both be important? How might they be complementary?

An example: vegetarians and disgust (Rozin). It seems that those who become vegetarian for moral reasons come to have greater disgust responses to meat than those who become vegetarian for health reasons. Perhaps then our affective responses can work to back-up our cognitive judgments: it is much easier to resist doing something if one finds it disgusting or repellent. (Although of course there might not be simple disgust but ambivalence—witness what happens when certain sexual behaviours are socially proscribed.)

## Psychopathy

One way of thinking about how our moral sensibilities do work is to think about cases in which they don’t. Some people discuss fictional cases: Satan, especially as characterized by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, provides one extreme example (‘Evil be thou my good’); other plays and novels provide others. The difficulty with this approach is that the portrayal is only as accurate as the beliefs of the writer; if there are widespread misconceptions about how evil individuals work, these will. If writers have false views about how we function, these will be reflected in their works.

Psychopathy (a.k.a. sociopathy or anti-social personality disorder — some people draw distinctions between these terms but I shan’t) presents real world cases of people who are minimally moved by ethical concerns. But what they show is not clear-cut. One central feature is

a failure of empathy: a failure to show an emotional reaction in the face of others' distress. From this, some have concluded that motivational internalism is false, since psychopaths can understand moral terms without being moved by them; and others have concluded that internalism is true, since it shows that, without the right affective responses, psychopaths cannot understand the moral terms.

It's a bit hard to know how to resolve this. But looking at the various deficits involved in psychopathy can help us see some of the factors that are involved in normal moral thinking, even it's unclear quite which are doing the most work.

Start with the failure of empathy. Empathy is often held to have two roles in moral sensibility. The first is *epistemic*: it is by imaginatively identifying with other people that you come to know what things are like for them. The second is *motivational*: it is by imaginatively identifying with other people that you become moved to act to help them. It seems possible for the two to come apart: an effective torturer might need to empathize with their victims to know what they most fear, though they have no motivation to help them (recall Room 101 in Orwell's *1984*).

Psychopaths score badly on both the epistemic and the motivational dimensions. They don't show the emotional reactions to witnessing others' distress that most subjects do (don't show elevated skin conductance for instance), and are not moved to help them. Equally they find certain emotions, especially fear, hard to recognize. (Viding talks of interviewing an inmate in a UK prison who failed to identify the emotion of fear as displayed in various pictures, and then said 'I really do not know what that emotion is, but I do know that it is what people look like just before I stab them.' p.22) Perhaps they do not feel fear themselves, although this is less clearly substantiated.

However, there are a number of other dimensions on which psychopaths do badly (this list is far from complete):

- Failure to get the moral/conventional distinction. Psychopaths have a tendency to view all norms as conventional. The reason why one shouldn't hurt someone is judged to be because it is 'against the rules'.

- Failure to feel guilt.

- Failure to make accurate predictions: greater focus on prospective rewards than on prospective costs.

- Failure to respond to social rewards.

- Failure to join with others' laughter; failure to have attention captured by happy faces.

Quite what is cause and what is effect here is far from clear. Do some of these features explain others? Are they all the effect of some common cause? Or are they simply a number of distinct features that happen to cluster together?

Psychopaths use moral language fairly accurately, at least to the extent that they can reliably classify actions as right or wrong.