

## VI Aspects of our Moral Sensibility II: Emotion, Empathy, Psychopathy, Internalism

### 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 Type<sub>1</sub>/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.