PHIL 480: Seminar in the History of Philosophy
Building Moral Character: Neo-Confucianism and Moral Psychology

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[Handout #12]
Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist
Approach to Moral Judgment

§ Main Theses

1. Moral reasoning is not the cause of moral judgment; rather, moral reasoning is usually a usually a post hoc construction, generated after a judgment has been reached.
2. An alternative: the social intuitionist model.
3. The social intuitionist model is a social model in that it deemphasizes the private reasoning done by individuals and emphasizes instead the importance of social and cultural influences; the model is an intuitionist model in that it states that moral judgment is generally the result of quick, automatic evaluations (intuitions).

§ Social Intuitionism

1. **There are moral truths.**
2. **When people grasp these truths, they do so not by a process of ratiocination and reflection, but rather by a process more akin to perception – one sees without argument that they are and must be true ("self-evident").**
3. **Moral intuitions (including moral emotions) come first and directly cause moral judgments.**
4. **Moral intuition is a kind of cognition, but it is not a kind of reasoning.**
5. **Moral judgment should be studied as an *interpersonal* process. Moral reasoning is usually an *ex post facto* process used to influence the intuitions (and hence judgments) of other people.**
6. **A descriptive claim: Moral reasoning is rarely the direct cause of moral judgment. Moral action covaries with moral emotion more than with moral reasoning.**

Figure 2. The social intuitionist model of moral judgment. The numbered links, drawn for Person A only, are (1) the intuitive judgment link, (2) the post hoc reasoning link, (3) the reasoned persuasion link, and (4) the social persuasion link. Two additional links are hypothesized to occur less frequently: (5) the reasoned judgment link and (6) the private reflection link.

§ Rationalism versus Sentimentalism

Moral Rationalism	Moral Sentimentalism
Is a normative thesis	Is a descriptive thesis
Moral reasoning is/ought to be the cause of moral judgment (only judgment based on moral reasoning is of moral worth)	Moral reasoning is rarely the cause of moral judgment; it is usually the ex post facto justification or explanation
Emotions are linked to desire and hence to sin. Moral action should be based on moral reasoning.	Moral actions covary with moral emotion more than with moral reasoning.
Plato, the Stoics, Christian philosophers, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Rawls, Kohlberg…	**Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, Blackburn, Slote…. Mencius**

* Hume's Argument

1. Reason is a tool used by the mind to obtain and process information about events in the world or about relations among objects.
2. Reason can let us infer that a particular action will lead to the death of many innocent people, but unless we care about those people, unless we have some *sentiment* that values human life, reason alone cannot advise against taking the action.
3. Therefore, reason alone cannot motivate moral action.

> **Hume: A person in full possession of reason yet lacking moral sentiment would have difficulty choosing any ends or goals to pursue and would look like what we now call a *psychopath*.**

§ The Social Intuitionist Model

* Four Links in Social Intuitionist Model:

#1. The Intuitive Judgment Link: Moral judgments appear in consciousness automatically and effortlessly as the result of moral intuitions.

Moral intuitions	⟶	Moral judgments

#2. *The Post Hoc Reasoning Link*: Moral reasoning is an effortful process, engaged in after a moral judgment is made, in which a person searches for arguments that will support an already-made judgment**.**

Moral judgments	⟵	Moral reasoning

#3. *The Reasoned Persuasion Link***:** Moral reasoning is produced and sent forth verbally to justify one's already-made moral judgment to others.

Moral reasoning	→	Justification of moral judgment

#4. *The Social Persuasion Link***:** The mere fact that friends, allies, and acquaintances have made a moral judgment exerts a direct influence on others, even if no reasoned persuasion is used. In many cases people's privately held judgments are directly shaped by the judgments of others.
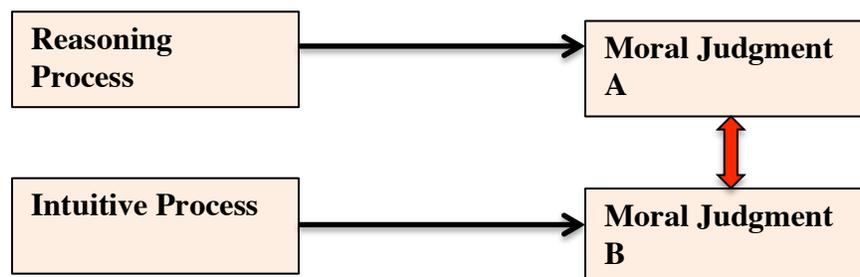
Others' moral judgments	→	One's moral judgment

* Two Links Emphasized by the Rationalist Model (In the social intuitionist model, moral judgment consists primarily of Links 1-4, although the model allows that Links 5 and 6 may sometimes contribute.):

#5. *The Reasoned Judgment Link***:** People may at times reason their way to a judgment by sheer force of logic, overriding their initial intuition. In such cases reasoning truly is causal and cannot be said to be the "slave of the passions."

#6. *The Private Reflection Link*: In the course of thinking about a situation a person may spontaneously activate a new intuition that contradicts the initial intuitive judgment. The most widely discussed method of triggering new intuitions is role-taking.

* The Dual-Process in Judgment Formation

Reasoning Process	→	Moral Judgment A
Intuitive Process	→	Moral Judgment B

(Moral Judgment A ↕ Moral Judgment B)

Social Intuitionist Model's Analysis of the Dual Process:
1. The model posits that the intuitive process is the default process, handling everyday moral judgments in a rapid, easy, and holistic way.
2. It is primarily when intuitions conflict, or when the social situation demands thorough examination of all facets of a scenario, that the reasoning process is called upon.

3. Moral reasoning naturally occurs in a social setting, between people who can challenge each other's arguments and trigger new intuitions (it can occur privately, but more common among those who have a high need for cognition).
4. The social intuitionist model avoids the traditional focus on conscious private reasoning and draws attention to the role of moral intuitions, and of other people, in shaping moral judgments.

§ Biased Moral Reasoning

Two major classes of motives have been shown to bias and direct reasoning.

(1) Relatedness Motive: People's desire for harmony and agreement has strong biasing effects on judgments (we tend to side with our friends and against our enemies).
   a. **The chameleon effect:** People unconsciously mimic the postures, mannerisms and facial expressions of their interaction partners.
   b. **The social persuasion link**: We can be directly affected by judgments of our friends and allies.

(2) Coherence Motive: People construct views of themselves and of the world, and they readily change their thinking and beliefs to avoid the threat of internal contradictions.
   a. **Defense Motive:** "the desire to hold attitudes and beliefs that are congruent with existing self-definitional attitudes and beliefs"
   b. Reasoning is used to defend prior moral commitments.

* Mechanisms of Bias:

* "my-side bias" – people show a strong tendency to search for anecdotes and other "evidence" exclusively on their preferred side of an issue.

* "makes-sense epistemology" – Once people find supporting evidence, even a single piece of bad evidence, they often stop the search, since they have a "makes-sense epistemology" in which the goal of thinking is not to reach the most accurate conclusion but to find the first conclusion that hangs together well and that fits with one's important prior beliefs.

* "directional goals" – Motivations to reach a preordained conclusion cause a biased search in memory for supporting evidence only.

* "biased hypothesis testing" – Self-serving motives bias each stage of the hypothesis-testing sequence, including the selection of initial hypotheses, the generation of inferences, the search for evidence, the evaluation of evidence, and the amount of evidence needed before one is willing to make an inference.

* "confirmatory bias" – When hypotheses involve one's moral commitments (e.g., "the death penalty does not deter murder"), the empirical findings generally show bias and motivated reasoning.

Summary:
__ The roots of human intelligence, rationality, and ethical sophistication should not be sought in our ability to search for and evaluate evidence in an open and unbiased way.
__ Rather than following the ancient Greeks in worshiping reason, we should instead look for the roots of human intelligence, rationality, and virtue in what the mind does best: perception, intuition, and other mental operations that are quick, effortless, and generally quite accurate.
___ The reasoning process in moral judgment may be capable of working objectively under very limited circumstances: when the person has adequate time and processing capacity, a motivation to be accurate, no *a priori* judgment to defend or justify, and when no relatedness or coherence motivations are triggered. This is exactly the kind of moral dilemma scenarios that the rationalist model uses. The rationalist research methods may therefore *create* an unusual and nonrepresentative kind of moral judgment.
___ Under these more realistic circumstances, moral reasoning is not left free to search for truth but is likely to be hired out like a lawyer by various motives, employed only to seek confirmation of preordained conclusions.

§ The Function of the Reasoning Process

1. **post hoc causal constructions** – When asked to explain their behavior, people are searching for plausible theories about why they might have done what they did. They are not searching for a memory of the actual cognitive processes that caused the behavior since those processes are not accessible to consciousness.
2. **"interpreter" module** – Behavior is usually produced by mental modules to which consciousness has no access, but the interpreter module provides a running commentary anyway, constantly generating hypotheses to explain why the self might have performed any particular behavior.
3. **Post hoc moral reasoning and *a priori* moral theories** – People lack access to their automatic judgment processes; hence, when they provide justification for their judgments, they consult their *a priori* moral theories, which are a pool of culturally supplied norms for evaluating and criticizing the behavior of others. A priori moral theories provide acceptable reasons for praise and blame.

§ Tail-Wag-the-Dog

(i)   *wag-the-dog illusion*: We believe that our own moral judgment (the dog) is driven by our own moral reasoning (the tail).

(ii)   *wag-the-other-dog's-tail illusion*: In a moral argument, we expect the successful rebuttal of an opponent's arguments to change the opponent's mind.

Moral reasoning may have little persuasive power in conflict situations, but the social intuitionist model says that moral reasoning can be effective in influencing people before a conflict arises.

§ Moral Action Covaries With Moral Emotion More Than With Moral Reasoning

1. The case of psychopath – With no moral sentiments to motivate and constrain them, they simply do not care about the pain they cause and the lives they ruin.
2. Empathy-Altruism correlation – empathy aroused by the perception of someone's suffering evokes an altruistic motivation directed toward the ultimate goal of reducing the suffering.

Moral reasoning is worth studying because people use moral reasoning so frequently for communication. To really understand how human morality works, however, it may be advisable to shift attention away from the study of moral reasoning and toward the study of intuitive and emotional processes.

§ Conclusion:

1. Moral development is primarily a matter of the maturation and cultural shaping of endogenous intuitions.
2. People can acquire explicit prepositional knowledge about right and wrong in adulthood, but it is primarily through participation in custom complexes involving sensory, motor, and other forms of implicit knowledge shared with one's peers during the sensitive period of late childhood and adolescence that one comes to feel, physically and emotionally, the self-evident truth of moral propositions.
3. In the social intuitionist view, moral judgment is not just a single act that occurs in a single person's mind but is an ongoing process, often spread out over time and over multiple people. Reasons and arguments can circulate and affect people, even if individuals rarely engage in private moral reasoning for themselves.
4. The social intuitionist model, therefore, is not an anti-rationalist model. It is a model about the complex and dynamic ways that intuition, reasoning, and social influences interact to produce moral judgment.
5. We can go back to Hume's perverse thesis: **that moral emotions and intuitions drive moral reasoning, just as surely as a dog wags its tail.**

§ Reflections

Q: What implications do you think the social intuitionist model has on our ethical theories?