

# Intuition, Deliberation and the Importance of Mature Moral Functioning

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# Paradigm shift in psychology

- A paradigm shift is occurring in psychology away from the view that conscious deliberate processing is dominant to the view that implicit processing is dominant
- In the past, gut feelings and heuristics were often ridiculed as irrational.
  - Now, a priori reasoning is often considered unnatural and rare (Mercier & Sperber, 2010).

# Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model (SIM)

“Moral judgment is a product of quick and automatic intuitions that then give rise to slow, conscious moral reasoning”

Moral judgment is evaluating the actions or character of others. (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008).

*The model has been generalized to all of moral functioning but in H&B (2008b) Haidt acknowledges for first time it is a theory of moral judgment (evaluation) only.*

# “Intuition is primary”

- Moral intuitions
  - occur rapidly and without awareness of their source,
  - convey a sense of rightness or wrongness without the assistance of reasons or reasoning.
  - may or may not be followed by reasoning
- When reasoning follows an intuition
  - it is used primarily to rationalize an intuition
  - or to persuade others to change their intuitions.

# Pre-hoc reasoning is “rare”

- Reasoning may be used
  - for private reflection
  - or as a way to form a judgment (particularly by those whose professional role requires it)

# Summary of Haidt's view

- Moral judgment is essentially quick and dirty—that fast, emotion-based heuristics guide moral judgment.
- Reasoning and deliberation are post-hoc, rationalizations, hopelessly biased or rarely used.

# Debate is dichotomized: Intuition or reason?

- Intuitionist theories
  - Moral intuition is primary for moral judgment
- Rationalist theories
  - Moral reasoning is primary for moral judgment

Let's move past the  
dichotomy and simplistic  
definitions



# Intuition and reasoning work together

Expertise uses well-educated intuitions and deep tacit practical reasoning as well as conscious reasoning and deliberation.

Let's look at the  
complexity of intuition  
and of reasoning

# 3 levels of automatic information processing (Hogarth, 2000)

- Basic, **Primitive**, Sophisticated
- Represent primitive, default processing systems that share commonalities such as
  - robustness when explicit systems are damaged,
  - low variability among individuals,
  - age and IQ independence,
  - and commonality of process across species (Reber, 1993).

# Primitive system

- Processes information without assessing meaning or interpretation
- Subsymbolic processing of environmental stimuli (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986),
  - E.g., mechanistic registration of the frequencies and covariation of events
  - inferring the implicit rules of systems (e.g., grammar).
- phylogenetically older system because it does not vary according to motivation, education, or intelligence (Hasher & Zacks, 1979).
- The primitive system learns implicitly and without effort; possessed by many animals (Reber, 1993).

# Most of what we know is tacit

- Most of what we know operates on a nonverbal level and cannot be verbalized (e.g., how a car engine works).
- We know far more than we can explain.
- Keil and Wilson (2000) distinguish between a basic explanatory set of preverbal conceptual schemas (Mandler, 2004), evident even in infant behavior,
- and more advanced explanatory schemas, built on layers of automatized conceptual knowledge, that include statements of principles and are evident through verbal performance.

# Understanding develops

- implicit learning is “phenomenally unconscious” (Buchner & Wippich, 1998).
- As with all of basic cognitive development, eventual mental understanding is founded on the physical experience of interaction with the environment through the “interiorization of action” (Chapman, 1988, p. 9).
- That is, understanding develops from initial reflexes toward more differentiated conceptual structures, moving from implicit to verbalizable understanding (Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983).
- This is rationality that can become verbalizable or not.

# Moral rationality

- Determining one's responsibilities are (Frankfurt, 1993),
- Weighing which action choice among alternatives is best (Rawls, 1971),
- Ascertaining which personal goals and plans to set (Williams, 1973),
- Reconciling multiple considerations (Wallace, 1988),
- Evaluating the quality of moral decisions made and actions taken (Blum, 1994),
- Juggling metacognitive skills such as monitoring progress on a particular moral goal or controlling attention to fulfill moral goals (Kekes, 1988).

# Naïve vs. well-educated intuition

- Moral intuitionist theories often seem to rely on data from novices using seat-of-the-pants intuition—a quick, pre-reflective, front-end intuition that novices typically display (Lapsley & Hill, 2008).
- Having a gut reaction to something does not indicate that a person is well-informed, knowledgeable, or trustworthy.



# Well-educated intuition

- From extensive experience that builds expertise
- comes about at the back end of experience (when conscious effort becomes automatized; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005)
- From extensive, focused practice = expertise development

# Expertise

- experts have better intuitions than novices, meaning they know what action would be effective and how to carry it out.
- Moreover, they have “negative expertise”—they know what actions not to take in solving a problem (Minsky, 1997) and pay attention to intuitions that signal uncertainty (Hogarth, 2001).
- See the world differently
- Use a combination of automatic (intuition) and deliberate responses

# Criticisms of Haidt's SIM theory

- (1) generalizes from simple problems of moral evaluation to moral functioning generally, ignoring that many moral judgments involve complexities not examined or explained by the theory;
- (2) does not address intuition management, ignoring the possible conflict, lack or error of intuitions;
- (3) ignores findings about reasoning and deliberation;
- (4) makes implicit assumptions about human nature that underestimate capacity;
- (5) limits the moral domain to negative morality (judging others)
- (6) starts with adults and minimizes development and education.

# Truthiness is Fatal: The Complexity of Mature Moral Functioning

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# Truthiness

*Things that a person claims to know intuitively or "from the gut" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts.*

Stephen Colbert

*The Colbert Report*

(satirical right-wing news show on Comedy Central,  
a USA cable television channel)

# Intuition can be misleading

- Newly-minted U.S. interrogators intuited that “torture works” because on the Fox TV show, “24,” the hero, Jack Bauer, uses torture to extract valuable information to save America each week.
- Real-life interrogators had different intuitions and practical knowledge about the ineffectiveness of torture based on their extensive training and experience (Roper, 2004; Sands, 2008).

# Intuitions are attractive

- Way processing system works—rapid perception and interpretation without awareness
- Cannot spontaneously control cognitive biases, even when aware of them
- We are wedded to our subjective impressions, to the degree of addiction because of
  - “repetitive satisfaction”— the positive feeling that accompanies the overconfidence in our intuitions (Trout, 2009, p. 124).

# Poor intuitions

- Cripple our compassion (Trout, 2009)
- Foster “dysrationality” (Stanovich, 1994) about the causes of poverty, crime, or climate instability
  - Can lead to policies that aggravate rather than alleviate their true causes, adversely affecting the lives of millions
- “When our [moral] intuitions are guided by irrelevant factors, they *can't* be reliable guides” (Appiah, 2008, p. 85).



# Reasoning is not enough either

- Reasoning (rationality)
- Intuition
- Both are partial descriptions of human moral functioning
- Both are vital, integrated and educable in
  - Adaptive ethical expertise
    - Virtue in action
  - Moral deliberation
    - Iterative moral musical chairs

# What is needed for mature moral functioning?

- Individual capacities for
  - Moral imagination
  - Habituated empathic concern
  - Moral metacognition (moral self-monitoring, moral self-reflection)
- Collective capacities
  - Moral dialogue
  - Moral institutions
- These can lead to moral **innovation**

# Moral Imagination

- “The capacity to concretely perceive what is before us in light of what could be,” a primary task for moral judgment (John Dewey in Fesmire, 2003, p. 2)
- Higher order thinking skills considered to be key factors in astute thinking (Perkins, 1995):
  - ability to decenter away from one’s current view and to generate alternative scenarios.
  - reflection on and consideration of alternative viewpoints
  - reflection on the implications of past and future action on others and their potential reactions.
  - look for counterevidence to first reactions, impulses, and preconclusions.

# Habituated Empathic Concern

- “The animating mold of moral judgment,” necessary but not sufficient for moral judgment (John Dewey, 1932, p. 270).
- Compassion for others along with a sense of responsibility and a propensity to act for their dignity.
- Disciplined response

# Moral Metacognition

- Metacognitive skills allow the self to manage and complete tasks well (Zimmerman, 2000).
- Self-regulatory tasks such as monitoring progress towards a goal, changing course when necessary, modifying strategies as needed and having a sense of efficacy in doing these things (Zimmerman, 2000).

# Moral metacognition

- ▶ Moral locus of control
- ▶ Moral self-monitoring
- ▶ Moral self-reflection

# Moral Locus of Control

- Internalized sense of morality, that is, taking responsibility for oneself and one's behavior.
- Owning one's thoughts, feelings and actions, and their consequences, possessing them as an agentic self (Blasi, 2009).

# Moral Self Monitoring

- The capacity to step back from and monitor one's processes and actions.
- Includes employing emotion regulation skills
  - self-calming in the face of uncertainty or conflict
  - coordinating social perspective and decision making
  - controlling prejudice (Monteith et al., 2002).
- Introspective ongoing and post-event analysis makes a critical difference in developing insights in a particular domain (Clark, 2008).




# Moral Self Reflection

- Similar to moral imagination but turned inward.
- Is this the moral self I want to be?
- Attending to the moral intuitions one encourages in the self.

# Collective Capacities

- *Community moral dialogue*
  - undergirded by community moral imagination (Boulding, 2000), institutions and narratives (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003)
  - promotes mutual understanding and joint problem solving (e.g., civil rights movement in USA; Youniss, 2008)

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- *Well-planned moral institutions*
    - can counter the unreliable and uncontrollable intuitions that undermine social justice by setting the parameters for choice, lubricating the path to virtue (Trout, 2009).

# Moral Innovation

- Major social action and societal transformation result from coalitions of organizations that act together (Youniss, 2008): e.g. US civil rights movement.
- Because it takes a village to save a refugee, individuals rarely take action alone and usually act in cooperation with others (Hallie, 1979).

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- Moral innovation comes about through the combined synergy of effectivities of all these skills that **combine intuitive and deliberative knowledge.**

Moral expertise or  
moral virtue with practical wisdom

## For more information and papers

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Paper under re-review:

*Moral Complexity: The Fatal attraction of truthiness and the importance of mature moral functioning*

by D. Narvaez