

Morality



Outline

Moral intuitions vs. moral reasoning

Evolutionary foundations of moral intuitions: Haidt's 5 domains

- Reciprocity: Theory of mind underlies moral judgments
- Ingroup loyalty: Someone (God) may be looking
- Purity: Disgust, politics, and persuasion

Moral intuitions and moral reasoning

Is there a deep-seated moral grammar that is part of human nature? What does it consist of? What good is it?

A tendency to think of decision-making as conscious, based on reason and logic (moral reasoning)

But in people with normal brains, these decisions also intuitive, and are shaped by emotion (moral intuition)

Moral intuitions: Fast, automatic, affect-laden

Moral reasoning: Slower, conscious, less emotional

Moral intuition & moral reasoning (2)

Julie is traveling in France on summer vacation from college with her brother Mark. One night they decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. Julie was already taking birth-control pills, but Mark uses a condom, too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love but decide not to do it again. They keep the night as a special secret, which makes them feel closer to each other.

What do you think about that? Was it OK for them to make love?

(Haidt, 2001)

Moral intuition & moral reasoning (2)

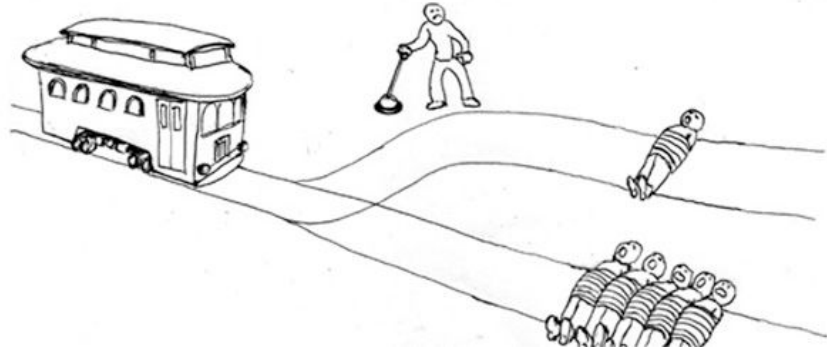
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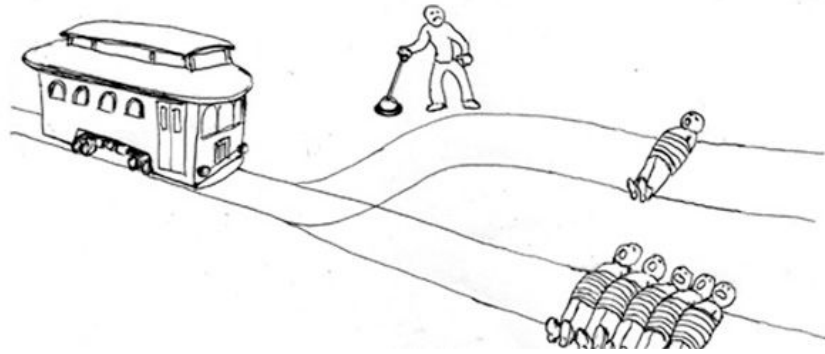
Most people say no - but struggle to justify it (scenario stipulates birth control and no psychological harm to the siblings)

Moral intuition: The runaway trolley



1. Would you flip the switch to divert the trolley? (Why?)

Moral intuition: The runaway trolley



1. Would you flip the switch to divert the trolley?
2. Would you push the fat man off to block the trolley?
3. What if the fat man was a villain who tied the people to the track?

What are moral intuitions based on?

If moral intuitions are not based on costs and benefits, then on what?

Haidt (assigned reading) sees the source of these moral domains as deriving from different aspects of evolved psychology.

Moral Domain	Adaptive Benefit
Avoiding harm/caring	Protecting young, kin
Fairness/Reciprocity	Dyadic non-kin cooperation
Ingroup Loyalty	Collective action/group cooperation
Authority/Respect	Negotiating hierarchy
Purity/Sanctity	Avoiding pathogens

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Theory of mind, intent, and reciprocity

We saw that we have a mind evolved to detect cheaters. And to read intentions (theory of mind).

There is a moral dimension to this -- because we evaluate what people do not just on their actions, but on their intent.

And the intent is what matters, if you are judging a future partner.

Theory of mind underlies moral reasoning

Two friends take a coffee break at a chemical plant. Mary asks Grace to pass the sugar, and Grace hands her a dispenser clearly labeled 'Sugar.' Unbeknownst to either woman, however, the dispenser contains not sugar, but a poisonous chemical that looks like it. Mary drinks her toxin-sweetened coffee and dies a few hours later.

Is Grace to blame?

Theory of mind underlies moral intuitions

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Is Grace to blame?

Most people say “no” . They weight intention over outcome, and forgive accidental harm.

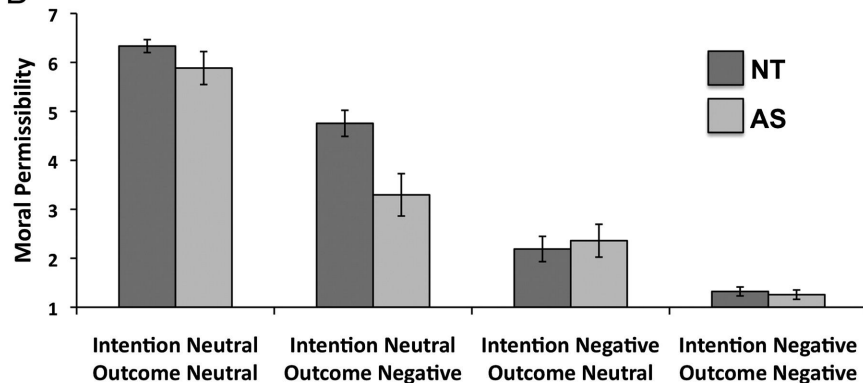
This kind of moral decision requires theory of mind.

Theory of mind & moral judgments (2)

A

		Outcome	
		Neutral	Negative
Intention	Neutral	Neutral (No Harm)	Accidental Harm
	Negative	Attempted Harm	Intentional Harm

B



In comparison with neurotypical adults (NT), high-functioning adults with autism (AS) are impaired in using theory of mind to make moral judgments (even when they can pass the false belief test).

Caveat: There are no “correct” answers to these moral assessments, and people vary in how much weight to give to intent. But they affect our judgments about whether to trust a person in future so are relevant to the evolution of reciprocity & cooperation

Theory of mind, morality, and development

How do children respond in a false-belief test where one person did something wrong by accident?

(he ate the wrong sandwich - the wind blew his on the ground after he left and another had been put in its place):

the 5-year old realized that he would eat the sandwich where he had left it, (by mistake) but still thought he should be punished for it.

Not until 7 did the child say he was blame-free because it wasn't his fault.

In Rebecca Saxe's TED talk, ["How we read each other's minds"](#)

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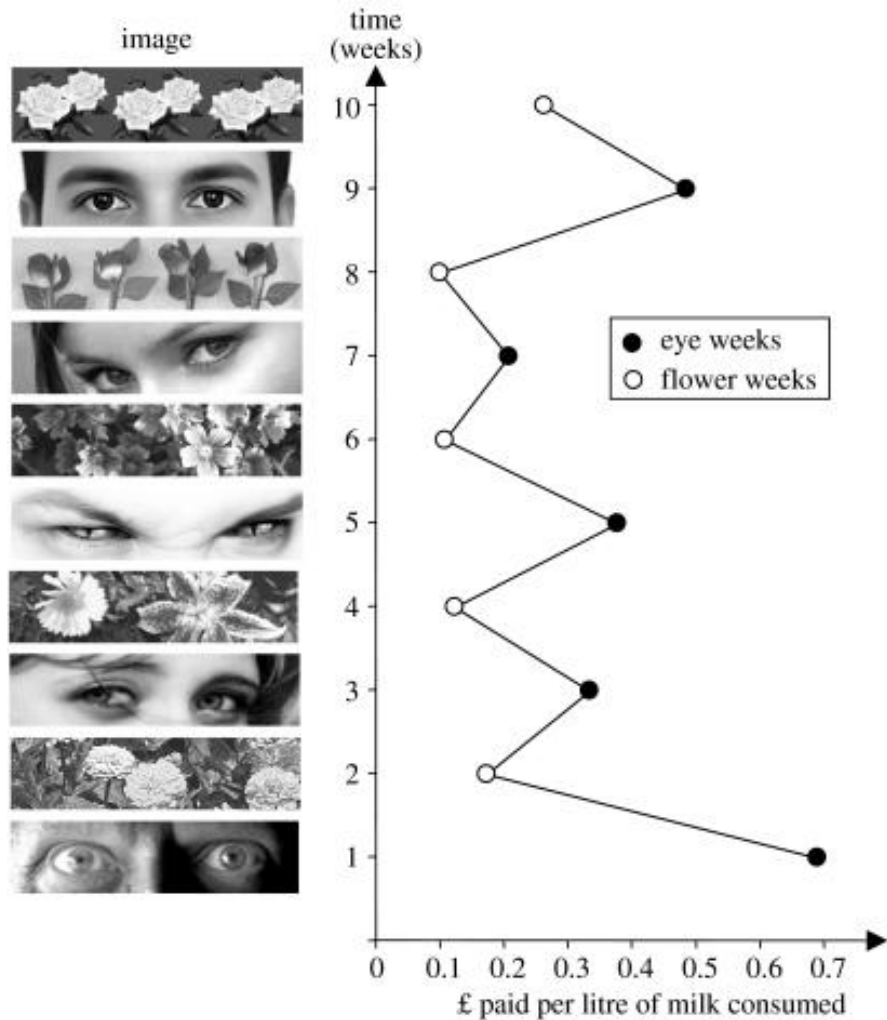
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Someone might be watching...(1)

Do pictures of eyes make people more generous? (cues of being watched elicit reputational concerns)

Images placed over an “honesty box” in a University lounge.

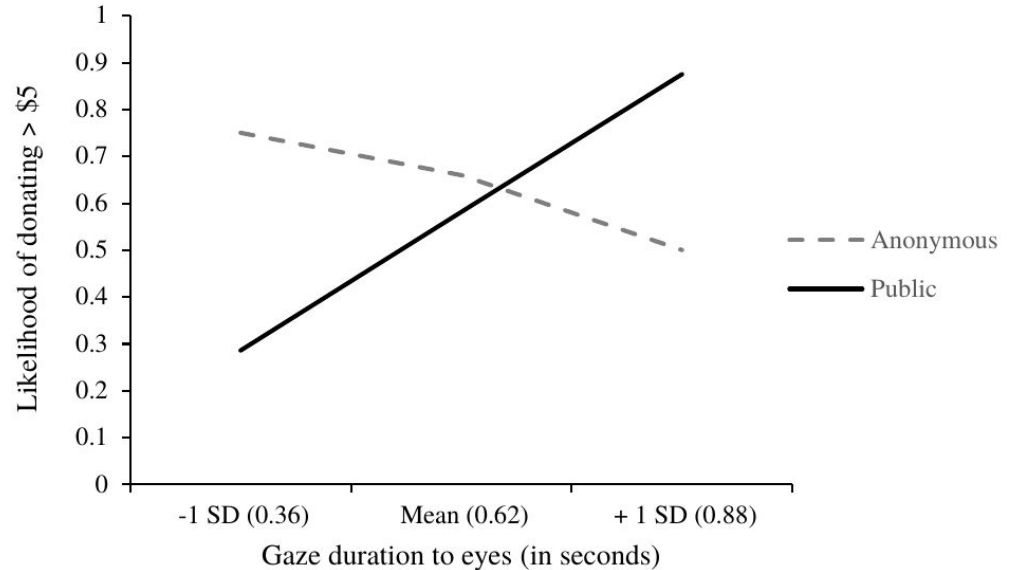
Bateson et al. *Biol Letters* 2006

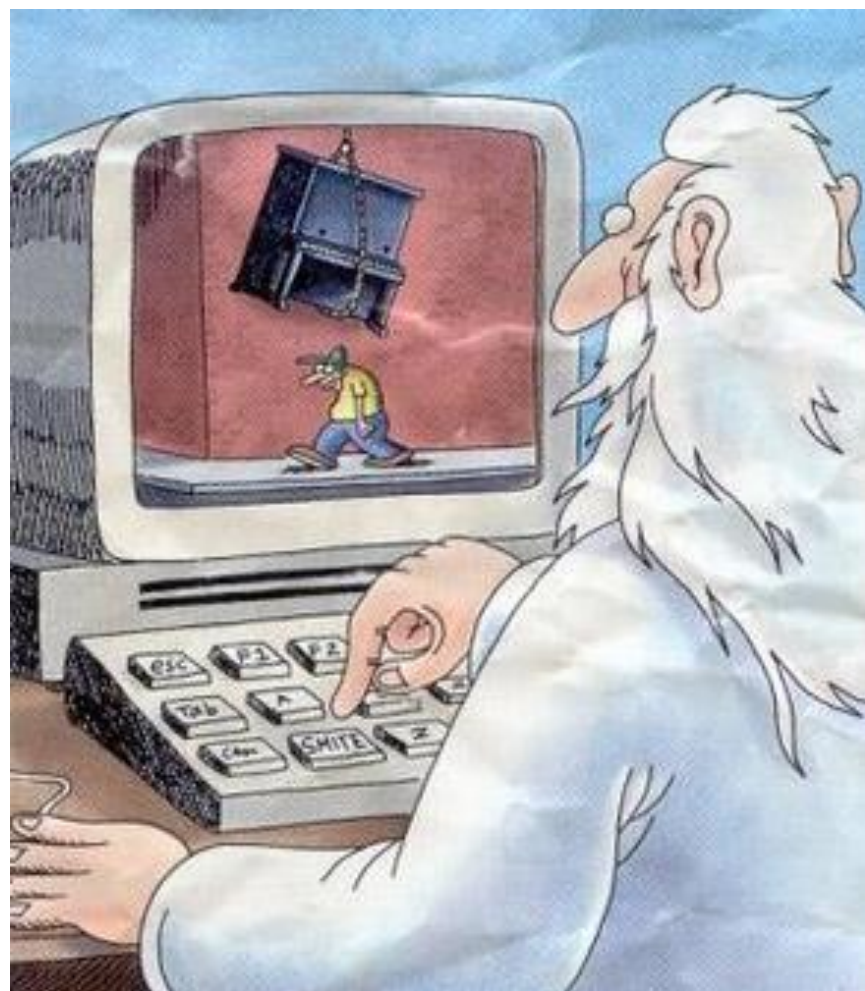


Someone might be watching... (2)

Jury still out on how generalizable the effect is. This study used an eye tracker.

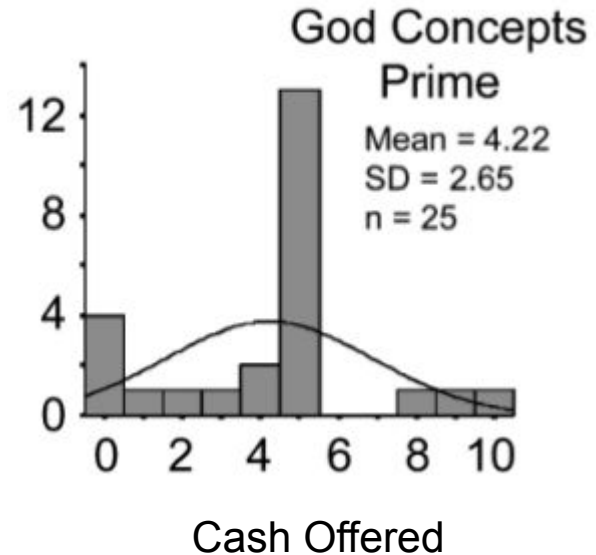
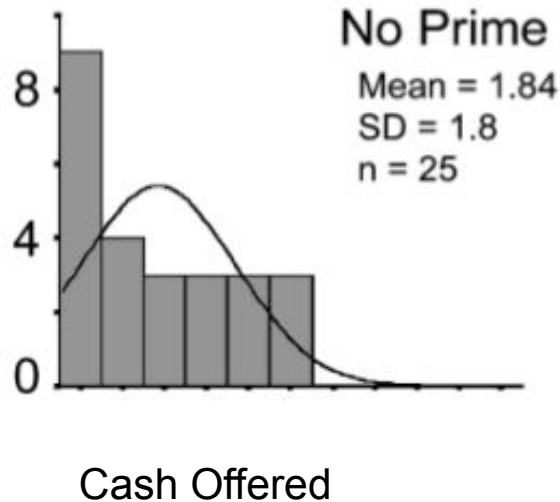
greater attentiveness to eyes correlated with greater generosity on a donation task when donations were public, not when anonymous.





When God is Watching People are More Generous

Cash offered in a dictator game after religious or no primes (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007 - assigned reading).



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Purity and disgust

People say someone's immoral actions sickened them. Literally? Yes

Moral misconduct causes physical feelings of disgust.

Reading the Julie and Mark incest story caused people to report feelings of nausea, gagging and reduced appetite, compared to a control story where they were not siblings.

(from Royzman et al. 2008)



Washing away your sins

Ritual ablutions cope with morally compromising situations

Study 3: Percentage who chose antiseptic wipes

Study 4: Percentage who volunteered to help

Ethical recall
(*n* = 16)

Unethical recall
(*n* = 16)

Cleansed
(*n* = 22)

Not cleansed
(*n* = 23)

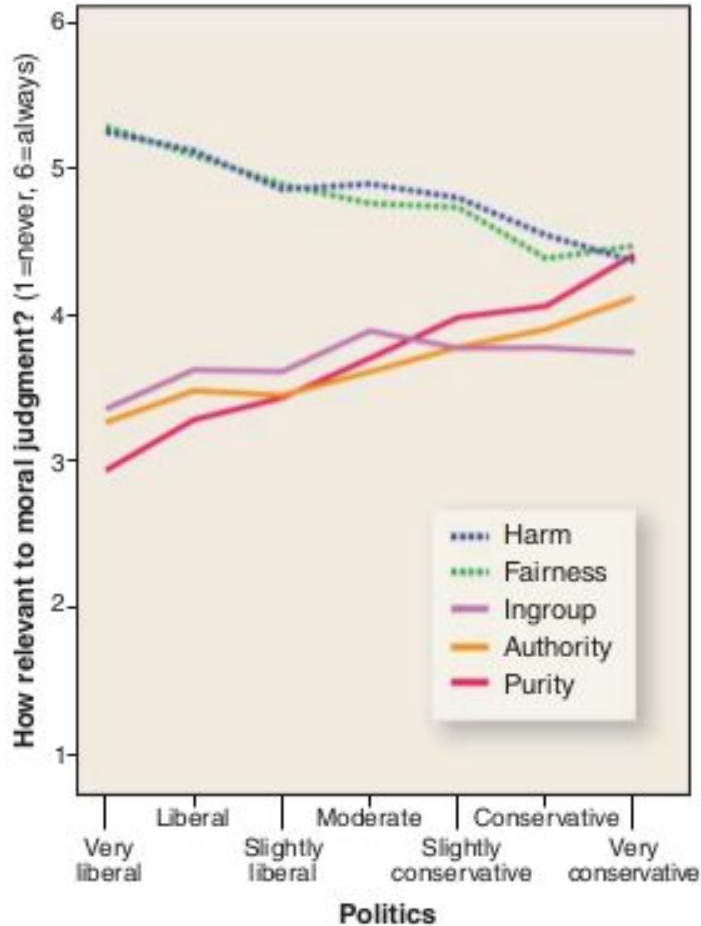
37.5%

75%

40.9%

73.9%

Is morality universal?



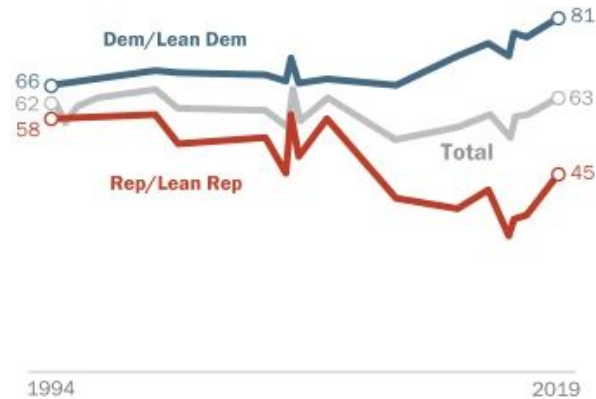
When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?"

- Whether or not someone was harmed
- Whether or not someone acted unfairly
- Whether or not someone betrayed his or her group
- Whether or not the people involved were of the same rank
- Whether or not someone did something disgusting


Is environmentalism a political issue?

Majority of Americans say stricter environmental laws are 'worth the cost'

% who say stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-14, 2019.

Pew Research Center 

Or a moral one?

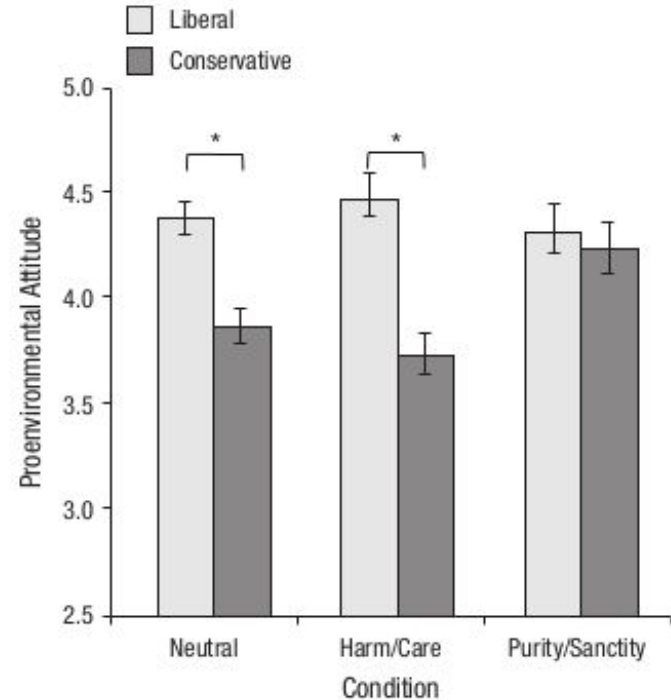
Most environmental media messaging is about harm/care, not purity. What happens if you recast the messaging to emphasize purity?

3 groups of participants read editorial about either:

- caring for and protecting the environment
- cleaning and purifying the environment
- history of neckties

Purity condition enhanced pro-environmental attitudes (& disgust) among conservatives

Feinberg & Waller *Psych Sci* 2012



Concluding thoughts

Haidt says: morality literature focuses on harm (trolley problems), and lots on reciprocity and fairness (ultimatum games, theory of mind, etc).

But we also need to understand how people develop feelings of patriotism, respect for tradition, and a sense of sacredness

So the hope is that understanding another's moral viewpoint, even if you don't share it, might help you find a way to communicate with them.