

Marc D. Hauser

Moral Minds
pp. 121-131

Introduction:

- The most important question that Hauser implies is “ What exactly is permissible killing and justifiable punishment?”; in what extent we are able to harm and what are the social, cultural and religious specifics of moral judgements; how we react in specific cases when a fast decision is necessary?

MARC D. HAUSER

Judgement Day
(pp. 121-131)

- Nature of moral judgements is either based on reason and logic or it is a case of letting intuition to play its role. But a work on nature of intuition is necessary in that case. The basis of intuition can be clear-headed, emotion-free, but that comes out only by training in philosophy.
- It is not about being smart, but about learning to reason and achieve clear intuitions.
- **But still a question remains – what is the difference between a philosopher who has thought long and hard about moral dilemmas and an average person?**

- Especially, this case applies for applied issues like **euthanasia, abortion and suicide**.
- Also there is a difference between killing and letting die.
- At the end we should consider whatever an act is permissible or forbidden.

Reasoning about how the mind computes whether an act is permissible or forbidden should be taken into account.

- The psychologist Lewis Petronovich was the first to explore how untrained in philosophy people judge in the cases of classical moral dilemmas. A difference should be made between **kin and non-kin, human and animal, individuals in ethnic groups**.
- Moreover, the cultural difference has influence from and depends on such specific things like politically neutral versus politically abhorrent persons (Nazis), (killing a black person if you are white). Here, there is a difference in Eastern and Western civilization too.

Individual moral judgments reflect evolved, universal decision-making processes that increase genetic fitness.

- However it is hard to say whether a decision is based on **intuition or conscious reasoning** from explicit moral principles.
- It is a fact that kinship, familiarity, and political affiliation influence moral judgements.

- The philosopher John Mikhail says that if the persons involved in the dilemmas are anonymous, it causes the subjects to judge on the basis of intention, action, and consequence in the terms of common law.

- The results are as follows:
 1. The principle of *prohibition of intentional battery* that forbids unpermitted, unprivileged bodily contact that results in physical harm.
 2. The principle of *double effect* as a traditional moral and legal principle – prohibited acts may be justified if the harm they cause is not intentional and the intended good effects outweigh the bad effects.

Still there is no evidence that gender, age, or national affiliation influence the pattern of permissibility judgements.

- Surprisingly, people are largely incoherent when it comes to explain their judgements. For example in the case of same result – killing one and saving five, is judge different in the way that a person can do that action.
- An interesting usual explanation is that one is using a *gut* response, an *instinct* or an *intuition*. But people are confident about their judgements and clueless with respect to their action justifications.

This is important conclusion about our moral faculty and operative principles.

- For example, killing is wrong if it is intended as a means but permissible if unintended but foreseen as by-product of a greater good.
- Mikhail's claim is that the key idea driving actions upon our knowledge of morality is similarly intuitive, based on unconscious and inaccessible principles structures of mind.
- In contrast, Carol Gilligan says that for example in the cases of moral dilemmas, girls tend to rely more on issues related with caring and boys – with ones that are concerned with justice.

These gender specifics should be considered well.

→ But when it comes to our evolved moral faculty and competence – we speak in one voice – “the voice of our species”.


- There is a psychological cleavage between what people say is morally permissible and what they offer as a justification of their moral judgement in given situation.
- Usually the mind adjudicates when it comes to complex moral dilemmas that take time for decision making.

*Is the thinking of greater good a moral transgression?
is a main question in those cases.*

*And how we approve the case when only the numbers
win?*

- If it is a case of killing a young child and save for example two or three grown up persons, of which someone is going to die by natural reasons?
- All those questions arise and get more difficult when it is about a case of a choice of a mother for the child's life.

Answering of some of the issues mentioned above in the work of Petrinovich and Mikhail is given by Hauser students that in particular create a "moral sense test" (moral.wjh.harvard.edu).

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- ▶ The data of the test is collected from more than 60 000 subjects from 120 countries which cover young people of age of 7 and adults of age of 70; males and females; individuals with no education, ones from primary school, secondary school, college, Ph.D.s, MDs, and JDs. Religion diversity is also taken into account: atheists, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.
 - ▶ The problems include the trolley dilemma, and so on – the ones that involve harm, rescue, and distribution of beneficial resources such as medicine for example. Special attention is given to the identity of agents (e.g. unknown bystander, or target/victim).
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The classification of the actions is as follows:

- ▶ **1. Permissible action**
- ▶ **2. Obligatory action**
- ▶ **3. Forbidden action**

- ▶ Justification of the actions is required and also an analysis of the subject's explanation in terms of coherent and incoherent responses.



- Interesting case is shown in the first moral dilemma; where about a 90% of people said that it is permissible for Denise to flip the switch, whereas only about 10% said that it is permissible for Frank to push the large person. These were all English speakers and Internet users, but still with differences in age, ethnicity, religion, education and specific knowledge of moral philosophy.

But still, when explaining why Denise's action is permissible but Frank's is not, about 70% of subjects were exactly "clueless"!

- Some of the answers were insufficient and included appeals to God, emotions, hunches, gut feelings, deontological rules (e.g. killing is wrong), utilitarian point of view (e.g. for the greater good) ... and the natural saying "Shit happens!".
- Main distinction is still in the terms of personal and impersonal harm. But subjects didn't have that idea between the cases so we can conclude that often people tend to make moral judgements without being aware of underlying principles.

It is frequent occasion that those who have proper justification are older and wiser, generally well educated, and trained specifically in moral philosophy and law.

But from that research such conclusion cannot be made.

→ This all lead to the conclusion – does judgements concerning certain forms of harm are universal? The answer is that we still cannot say that as sure result of that observation.

All of the subjects were “Internet-savvy”. All of them surfing the Web in certain extent and also the ones who took the test can read and answer in English, majority of them native English speakers.

So in order to have a cross-cultural research the Web site was translated into another main for the world languages but the outcome was quite the same:

Permissible harm is sensitive to parametric variation, and judgements are not guided by consciously accessible principles.

- Nevertheless it was a cross-cultural reach, the linguistic analogy generate clear predictions:
→ Systematic differences between the cultures, based on parametric settings

In the utilitarian game the differences between the cultures are with respect to how the parameters are set in association with principles for harming and helping others.

Everyone perceives unconsciously the consequences and the importance between intended and foreseen actions, intended and accidental actions, actions and omissions, and introducing a threat as opposed to redirecting one.

We must figure out how different societies build from these universal factors to generate differences in moral judgements.

- In the specific case of organ donor – again saving five but killing innocent one is really different situation for judgement.
- Often an answer that these cases are artificial becomes useful when the moral dilemma is unsolvable.
- This is because a person has not access to the principles underlying his judgements, even when he thinks he does have an access – that is the case with the subjects of that study.
- In the cases of Ned and Oscar we can conclude: either the both actions are permissible or the both are not permissible. This means that our experience with these dilemmas influences our next judgements; there is impact on judgement that does not translate into our ability of justification or to access the underlying principles.

Moreover, it looks like people judge certain situations as permissible or not permissible for unknown reasons.

Conclusion:

- In the section “Judgement Day” a main focus is on trolley problem as illustration of how a science of morality can capitalize on linguistic analogy so that it can uncover some of the principles and parameters underlying our moral judgements.

JUDGEMENT DAY



That is “just a sketch” of a moral
grammar and moral knowledge.

MARC D. HAUSER

Macho Cultures
(pp.131-138)

- Firstly, the option of violence is considered as an anthropological issue
- Men are responsible for a disproportionately large number of homicides; and the largest number in percentage of committing homicide is in young unmarried men.
- Also societies where polygamy is supported, are the most vulnerable to such kind of violence, because “some men grab the lion’s share of spouses, leaving others with none”.

Humanities and social science research suggest that such pattern of violence is local phenomenon.

- But our biology imposes constraints on the pattern of violence, and the options for it are dependent on history and current conditions.
- Evolutionary psychologists Margo Wilson and Martin Daly suggest that “dangerous competitive violence reflects the activation of risk-prone mindset that is modulated by present and past cues of one’s social and material success, and by some sort of mental model of the current local utility of competitive success both in general and in view of one’s personal situation.”

The cultural variation is understandable only by specialized psychological observation.

- Example: The macho side can be visibly explained in situation when by accident you are bumped by another person who is acting aggressively. If the macho side (“Marlboro-smoking, trigger-happy guy”) dominates, we can refer to the so-called ***culture of honour***.
- That is the main cultural difference. The origins of a culture respectively affect the violence reactions in specific situations. For example the settlement of United States – South and North, highlights the relationship between resources, violence and social norms. Even now some researchers tend to believe that the South holds on the culture of honour (cases of infidelity killing for example).

- These results point that culture can push around our aggressive tendencies.
- But each human has a different “boiling point”. Also individuals of same culture have same “boiling points”.
- Also a distinction between impulsiveness and patience should be made. Taking a smaller reward implies that in time a greater reward can be achieved. The impulsive attitude facilitates violence.

Our moral faculty generates judgements about equity and justice more generally, pulling back the self-interest.

MACHO CULTURES



Each culture has its own set of signature constraints
on individual mental programs.

This represents the signature of parametric
variation.