

“Reading Marc D. Hauser’s *Moral Minds*”

Session 7: the former half of chapter 4 (pp. 163-200)

December 12, 2008

Presented by Daisuke Shimaoka

Reported by Ryoji Sato

In session 7, we read the former half of chapter 4 (pp. 163-200). On these pages, Hauser dealt with innate mental capacities which are strongly related to morality. He devoted many pages to deal with the innate capacity to interpret the movement of an object as having a mind. He sketched five underlying principles which operate in the interpretation, using experiments in developmental psychology. For example, the second principle describes the condition of ascribing intention to an object: “If an object moves in a particular direction toward another object or location in space, the target represents the object’s goal” (p. 173). We regard objects satisfying this condition as intentional agents. According to Hauser, we are innately equipped with these five principles, and using them, we can tell which objects are moral agents and which are not. They are necessary to deliver a moral verdict.

Apart from this capacity, Hauser discussed the role of emotions and the capacity of empathy in morality. It is intuitively true that empathy, taking another’s perspective, facilitates altruism. Hauser also admitted that empathy influences altruistic behavior. Yet he tried to defend his Rawlsian theory from this conclusion. He argued for the possibility that Rawlsian moral faculty determines whether an act is right or wrong prior to empathy. If he is right, empathy influences moral performance, but it does not affect moral competence. To support this view, he made use of a psychological experiment by the anthropologist Daniel Fessler. But we could not understand Hauser’s argument very well. It seemed to have some problem. Fessler’s experiment measured how subjects were reactive to various objects. Hauser tried to conclude the judgment of moral vegetarians that they should refrain from eating meat is antecedent to their gut reaction: disgust toward eating meat. First, he said that people who are highly reactive to one thing tend to be reactive to other things. Then, out of the blue, he claimed, “if disgust is a cause, then moral vegetarians should be more reactive to other disgusting things than health vegetarians or nonvegetarians. In contrast, if disgust is a consequence, then moral vegetarians will be as reactive or unreactive as health vegetarians and nonvegetarians” (pp. 197-8). This is the very point that we do not understand. He said nothing about the relationship between reactivity

and a cause-consequence matter. He might omit some explanation which is indispensable.

In chapter 4, he introduced many empirical findings. But, it might be too many. In some places, we could not find sufficient explanations for his argument. I already took up one example. Another example would be his explanation of innateness of comprehension of objects' solidity. From experiments where subjects are four- to five-month-old infants, Hauser held that infants' comprehension of object solidity is innate. But it seems possible to acquire from the environment during their several months.