

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

Session 9: the former half of chapter 5 (pp. 242-272)

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In session 9, we read the former half of chapter 5 (pp. 242-272). The title of chapter 5 is “Permissible Instincts”. In this chapter, Hauser aims to see how the moral machinery (which is dissected in chapter 4) works for an individual’s living and acting in a social world, and he tries to think about moral conflicts in our own species.

In the first section of this chapter, Hauser says that “imprinted genes” affected our morality. The “imprinted genes” are the genes which emerge either from mom’s or from dad’s gene. Hauser investigates the conflict between a child and parents by looking at this feature and states that this gene is under the competition between mom’s and dad’s interests. The individual evolved in the society is under the competition between instincts from the individual and from his/her group.

Hauser uses Trivers’s argument to understand the conflict among individuals. Trivers constructed a theory of reciprocity as follows:

1. small costs to giving and large benefits to receiving
2. a delay between the initial reciprocated act of giving
3. multiple opportunities for interacting, with giving contingent upon receiving (p. 254)

Then, by looking at fair play and lies, Hauser tries to understand how we had acquired the ability which is dedicated to steady cooperation. Now we see his discussion about lies. In all cultures, lies are prohibited in general. But in an exceptional case, white lies are permitted in almost all cultures. So the moral ability can evaluate the relation between cause and effect, as well as its intentional aspect. Then Hauser asked as follows: when can a child distinguish between harmful lies and white lies? Hauser mentions Talwar’s investigation. Talwar and colleagues replicated the sequence of events that typically transpire when children witness a moral transgression, then appear in court as witnesses, and are questioned about the transgression by a social worker. The court is a place which encourages children to tell the truth. But according to Talwar’s studies, it became clear that the court called children which are morally incompetent to take the witness stand. Hauser says that we should take care of and pay

attention to inconsistency between the moral ability and moral action.

The reporter, Mr. Isobe, pointed out that Talwer's experiments have a problem related with research ethics: is it morally permissible for a child to be a subject of the experiments?