

Seminar “Reading Prinz’s *The Emotional Construction of Morals*”
Session 5 (13:00-15:00, May 16, 2008)
Presented by Masaya Mine
Reported by Ryoji Sato

In session 5, we read 3.2.4–3.2.10. We discussed the remaining seven objections. In particular, we focused on “3.2.6 Moral Debate” and “3.2.8 The Reasoning Objection”. These two objections are the most important, because they relate to the subjectivity and relativity of morality.

Let me give a short summary of the other objections first. In 3.2.4, Prinz discussed the developmental objection. There are empirical data which show infants and autistic people can make moral judgments without comprehending moral emotions. But Prinz claimed one can have an emotion without having a concept of it. Thus, these data are not a good criticism of the sensibility theories. In 3.2.5, Prinz argued against the Euthyphro objection: we intuitively think that we disapprove an action because it is wrong, not vice versa. Prinz responded that he can endorse both ways, showing emotions and moral rules are in relation of co-creation. In 3.2.7, one can object to Prinz, pointing out that we sometimes have moral attitudes toward distant people, although he seemed to explain moral attitudes toward only people nearby. He gave some explanations based on his theory. In 3.2.9, Prinz answered to the manners monger objection: people who take manners seriously sometimes confuse conventional rules with moral rules. According to him, manners can be moral rules in a derivative way. Manners may derive from more basic moral norms (e.g. respect). In 3.2.10, Prinz dealt with the Kantian ethics. He showed the sensibility theories can explain the Kantian intuitions: moral rules are passion-independent, demands of reason, and universal. He also pointed out weak points of the Kantian ethics.

Hereafter, I will handle “3.2.6 Moral Debate” and “3.2.8 The Reasoning Objection”. The former objection is this. If moral properties are subjective, it seems quite unintelligible that there are moral debates. The latter objection seems similar to the former. Prinz maintained moral properties depend on our emotional reaction, for instance, something good is a thing which causes a feeling of approbation in us, and hence moral properties are subjective. If moral properties are subjective, roles of our rational reflections and discourses become unclear. Debates are not necessarily rational (e.g. a marital spat), but I will regard debates as rational here because most debates are rational or aim to be rational. In 3.2.6, Prinz proposed seven accounts for moral debates, but most of them undermine the effectiveness of rational debates. Prinz described causes of our debates, but he did not mention advantages of moral debates. Prinz mentioned a certain advantage of rational debates only in one of the seven accounts. When someone made an inconsistent judgment in the light of his/her basic values, you can correct him/her by rationally explaining his/her inconsistency. Rational debates can adjust one’s internal consistency.

Prinz also dealt with rational debates in 3.2.8. He claimed that we can make our values clear through rational discourses, and you may succeed in changing one’s moral judgments. But if we differ in “grounding norms” (p. 125), you can say nothing in that basic moral judgments are based on emotions. In such cases, Prinz said, “I respond, not with reason, but with the fist” (ibid.).

In the session, a participant in the session said that Prinz’s view of morality would not eliminate the possibility of wars and conflicts. Or it may even promote them. When you and I differ in grounding norms, all we can do is persuasion by power, according to Prinz. Another said, defending Prinz, we might not actually differ in grounding norms. Hence we might be able to give a solution to conflicts through rational debates. I think it is not easy to decide which is right, either by a conceptual or an empirical reason. First, we have to clarify precisely what are grounding norms. Then, we need to examine each conflict. But in either way, it seems important to provide a solution for a moral feud. Without it, our society cannot be so distinct from animal kingdom. I shall read the book, keeping this point in mind.