J. J. Prinz's Relativistic Morality and Convention

TSUTSUI Haruka

The University of Tokyo
JSPS Research Fellow (DC1)

Abstract

In his recent work *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (2007), Jesse J. Prinz proposes a moral theory which implies moral relativism. Based on the idea of moral emotionism, he relativizes morality to an individual or a culture. Such relativization seems to obscure the difference between morality and local custom or convention. Yet, through close examination, it becomes clear that Prinz's relativistic morality has a distinctive feature and is not assimilated to convention. The main difference consists in that, while alternative patterns of behavior to convention are known, those to morals are not necessarily known. I will prove this by comparing Prinzian moral concepts with two different notions of convention, namely, David Lewis's notion of convention and Ruth Garrett Millikan's notion of "natural convention".

1   Introduction

Jesse J. Prinz proposes a moral theory which has relativistic consequences. His position, which is called *constructive sentimentalism*, is manifested in his recent work *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (2007). According to this book, he commits to emotionism about morality, and moral relativism is derived as a consequence. In his theory, morality is explained as a construction from emotions, which is acquired through cultural education. Thus morality is relativized to an individual or a culture. That is, there is no universal moral rule. Such a theory seems to make moral norm just like local custom or convention. Yet it is true that we often find a certain difference in seriousness between moral and conventional rules.

In what follows, I will examine the similarity and difference between Prinz's relativistic morality and convention, with reference to two different notions of convention. The one is Lewisian convention, which was proposed in David Lewis's influential work *Convention: A Philosophical Study*. The other is natural convention proposed by Ruth Garrett Millikan. While Lewisian convention is based on rationality, natural convention is not. So it seems that emotion-based morality might be a kind of natural convention. I will thus place a special focus on the relationship between

natural convention and Prinzian morality. Is relativistic morality just a kind of convention, or has it some features which differentiate itself from convention? This is the main question in this paper.

2 Constructive Sentimentalism and its Relativistic Consequence

2.1 Constructive Sentimentalism

First, let me explain the gist of Prinz's theory of morality. His view, constructive sentimentalism, belongs to moral emotionism, and, among emotionist theories, constructive sentimentalism is categorized as a sensibility theory. Therefore, as a starting point, I will make clear what these categories are like.

Moral emotionism is a view which holds that our morality emerges from our emotion. Prinz endorses emotionism from a naturalistic motive. For naturalists, the main advantage of emotionism is that it explicates the relationship between the normative and the descriptive.

As famously noted by Hume, we cannot derive *ought* from *is*. To put it in a more strict way, a prescriptive or normative statement cannot be derived from purely descriptive statements. It is certainly true that what ought to be done is not necessarily the same as what is actually done. For instance, although it is a brute fact that a large number of people *are* in hunger, from this we cannot infer that a large number of people *ought* to be in hunger. But it might follow, then, that normativity or morality cannot be derived from any fact about the world. This consequence seems to endanger the ontological status of morality and lead us to dualism or moral nihilism. Naturalists must avoid such a path[1].

Prinz, as a naturalist, refuses dualism or nihilism and tries to locate morality appropriately in a naturalistic framework. He adopts emotionism for this purpose. Emotionism can save us from dualism or nihilism, for emotions are involved in the facts about the world. If morality emerges from our emotions, morality can be located in the world via empirical facts that we have certain kinds of emotions. Prinz tries to naturalize morality by such a strategy[2].

Prinz's emotionist moral theory is a kind which is called as sensibility theory. He first gives a schematic definition of this theory and then refines it, consequently ending up with a relativistic view. Let me explain what his initial schematic definition of a sensibility theory is and how it eventually leads to relativism.

Prinz defines sensibility theories by the following two theses:

(S1) Metaphysical Thesis: An action has the property of being morally right (wrong) just in case it causes feelings of approbation (disapprobation) in normal observers under certain conditions.

(S2) Epistemic Thesis: The disposition to feel the emotions mentioned in S1 is a possession condition on the normal concept RIGHT (WRONG)[3].

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1 Prinz 2007, pp. 1–2.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 87.

To show an advantage of sensibility theory, Prinz uses it to offer an effective answer to a challenge to morality advanced by John L. Mackie. The core idea of Mackie's challenge is same as that of Hume's Law. Mackie claims that a moral concept is very much confused and it is in fact a vacuous concept with no corresponding object in reality. His discussion goes as follows: moral facts are treated as part of the structure of the world. But at the same time, they are thought to be action-guiding. Put differently, moral facts are treated as both descriptive and prescriptive. These two aspects are inconsistent, however. The mere fact that a situation in the world is such and such is one thing, and the norm that tells us to do such and such is another. They are two different things. It is evident from Hume's Law that the one cannot be derived from the other. Then moral properties, which are thought to be designated by moral concepts, are in fact odd. It is difficult to conceive that such properties are real. Mackie regards moral properties as inexistent like fairies or phlogiston. He thus concludes that our moral judgments are false or meaningless[4].

Sensibility theories can refute such dualism or nihilism. According to S1, moral properties are *powers* to cause our emotions. Some sorts of situations have the power to elicit specific emotions in us. For example, situations in which violence is done make us feel anger or fear. Moral properties are powers like that. Such properties are among the facts of the world, and, at the same time, they motivate us via emotions to behave in a particular way. These are properties that are individuated by our inner states, that is, emotions. This point is made clear in comparison with color properties. Secondary qualities like colors belong to things in the world, though they are recognized and categorized according to our inner states, namely, color experiences. In the sensibility theories, moral properties are classified as secondary qualities. Defined as such, moral properties are no longer vacuous concepts, just as color properties are not. This is the trick to define emotions as properties which are at the same time located in the world and action-guiding[5].

The definition above gives just a rough outline of sensibility theories. It thus has some obscure expressions: what specific emotions are meant by the word "approbation" or "disapprobation"? Who are "normal observers" or what are "certain conditions"? Prinz offers refinements for each of these points. Hereafter I take up only refinements for (S1) to focus on moral relativism implied by Prinz's theory.

First, what is approbation/disapprobation? According to Prinz, emotions experienced when we morally approve or disapprove an action vary depending on context. For instance, when we behave wrongly toward others, we feel shame. Conversely, when others behave badly toward us, we feel anger. Approbation/disapprobation is in fact a range of emotions containing positive/negative emotions[6].

Second, which conditions matter to observing moral properties? It is difficult to give an answer by listing relevant factual knowledge required of observers. Rather, Prinz introduces the notion *sentiment*. A sentiment is an emotional disposition; that is, some physically realized states of the mind which manifest themselves as an occurrent emotion[7]. Moral sentiments are dispositions

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4   Ibid., p. 88.
5   Ibid., pp. 88–89.
6   Ibid., pp. 90–91.
7   For sentiments, see Prinz 2004, pp. 188–190; 2007, pp. 84–85.

to have emotions included in the spectrum of moral approbation/disapprobation. Prinz defines moral properties by appeal to moral sentiments. Such a definition does not need the specification of conditions under which observers have moral emotions. We can say just that sentiments *dispose* them to have emotions[8].

Third, who are normal observers of moral properties? Prinz says that using the term "normal observers" is in fact problematic. The reason is that we cannot define what is normal without relying on any moral value. That is, we can determine normal observers only relative to some moral value. For most of us, a normal observer according to my values is just me. Put more precisely, when a sufficiently rational person makes a moral judgment, he or she thinks of him/herself as an appropriate observer who can make moral judgments. After all, we can decide who is entitled to be a normal observer only relative to each person's value. The observer thus qualified is always an entitled observer. So Prinz defines moral properties relative to moral values of such an observer and omits the expression "normal observers"[9].

(S1) is thus refined into the following;

(S1′) An action has the property of being morally wrong (right) just in case there is an observer who has a sentiment of disapproval (approbation) toward it[10].

"Right" and "wrong" are exchanged. It is because, as Prinz notes after giving (S1), the role of the concept WRONG in morality is more important than that of the concept RIGHT. Though, as he concedes, it is based on an unexamined intuition, this intuition seems to have some adequacy[11].

Here Prinz's description is a bit misleading. To put it in a more appropriate way, the definition should be as follows:

(S1″) An action has the property of being morally wrong (right) relative to an observer O just in case O has a sentiment of disapproval (approbation) toward it.

Hereafter I use (S1″) instead of (S1′) as Prinz's definition of the property of being morally wrong/right.

2.2   Relativistic consequences

 (S1″) implies strong moral relativism, that is, the idea that moral properties are relative to individuals. Prinz points out, however, that sentiments possessed by individuals may actually converge. The reason is that cultural education is important for the acquisition of moral sentiments. Cultural education can be not only explicit but also implicit, given by showing some attitudes to those to be educated. Anyway, moral sentiments are acquired through sufficient moral education in a culture (cultures)[12].

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8   Ibid., pp. 91–92.

9   Ibid., p. 92.

10   Ibid.

11   Ibid., p. 91.

12   Ibid., pp. 183–187, 271–273.

Prinz emphasizes the role culture plays in relation to morality in three aspects. First, culture is the cause of morality. We get our moral values mainly from our culture. Second, culture is the effect of morality. People who have acquired the same moral values in a given culture will closely cooperate with each other to sustain their culture. Third, culture is the raison d'être for morality. It is obvious that morality emerged for making and maintaining a stable community (usually, socio-cultural community). Namely, morality exists because it has served for cultures as a maintenance system[13].

Note, however, that these aspects show only that morality *actually* has a socio-cultural character. From this, it does not follow that morality is *intrinsically* socio-cultural. Sure, cultural education is the main source for morality. But it is not clear if it is fundamentally impossible to get moral sentiments from any other source. Is socio-cultural character of our morality an intrinsic feature of morality, or is it only fortuitously acquired?

To begin with a conclusion, the socio-cultural aspect of Prinz's morality should be understood as an intrinsic character. The reason is found in the following discussion by Prinz. He holds that an ought judgment implies that a moral norm on which the judgment is based has authority over the judged behavior. Compare an ought judgment to a wrongness judgment: for instance, consider the two claims, "You ought not to beat your dog" and "It is wrong to beat your dog". They have slightly different meaning. In the former, a motivation to refrain from beating a dog is expressed as a more serious moral requirement which should be heeded. In other words, an ought judgment implies that the behavior of the person mentioned in the judgment is under the authority of a certain moral norm[14]. In Prinz's theory, this means that the person actually endorses the norm; namely, he or she has a moral sentiment that motivates him/her to follow that norm. Hence, it can be said that ought judgments presuppose that an appraiser who forms a judgment and an agent whose behavior is judged share moral norms. In other words, the concept of moral obligation is based on the assumption that there exist people who share the same moral values. Moral obligation, then, can hold only after being adopted by some people at the same time; that is, the existence of a group of people who share moral norms is needed as its basis[15].

The above does not apply to every moral concept. As mentioned, it does not always apply to wrongness judgments. This is because, compared to ought judgments, wrongness judgments do not directly make a claim about how the judged person should behave[16]. For example, the claim "It is wrong to beat your dog" does not directly indicate what you should do. Nonetheless, given that a fundamental moral concept like that of moral obligation presupposes people sharing the same moral values, it can be said that morality has intrinsically socio-cultural character.

In sum, Prinz underscores the socio-cultural character of morality for two reasons. First, actually there are links between culture and morality in three aspects mentioned above. Second, some fundamental moral concepts essentially presuppose the existence of the group of people sharing the same moral values[17].

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13   Ibid., p. 185.
14   Ibid., p. 95.
15   Ibid., pp. 178–179.
16   Ibid.
17   Ibid., pp. 185–186.

Although Prinz's moral theory manifests itself as individual relativism, in fact it rather has a culture-relativistic character. Moral properties emerge from the sentiment of each individual, but the sentiment is based on their culture. Thus, usually, in one culture, the same moral values are shared by every member.

The points of moral emotionism or sentimentalism by Prinz and its relativistic conclusion can be summarized as follows. First, his relativism is closely related to the idea that morality emerges from emotions possessed by each individuals. Second, though Prinz explicitly supports individual relativism, in fact, his theory also contains cultural relativism. Taking these points into account, in what follows, I scrutinize a question posed to Prinz's relativism and his reply.

3   Prinzian Morality and Convention

3.1   Is Prinzian Morality Conventional?

As discussed above, Prinz's moral theory implies individual and cultural relativism. But is it appropriate to describe morality as relative to an individual or culture? Notice that we have another kind of relativistic rules: namely, conventional rules. Rules about good manners (e.g. "You ought not to lick your chopsticks when you eat.") are of conventional type. Such rules are treated differently from moral rules like "You ought not to steal." In general, we give priority to keeping moral rules even if it costs a breach of conventional rules. For example, we admit that we should save lives even if we have to break local traditions for that purpose.

Conventional rules are peculiar to cultural group. For example, although it is a bad manner to eat up the dish you are served in China, the same behavior is considered as a good manner in Japan. In contrast, moral rules seem to have strong normativity that is independent of local culture. However, according to Prinz, moral rules hold only dependently on local culture. Why, then, do we take moral rules as much more serious than conventional rules? By what standards are we drawing a line between them?

According to Prinz, moral rules and conventional rules are distinguished by whether moral sentiments are involved or not. Both rules are taught through cultural activities. However, while the former are taught through inculcating sentiments, the latter are not. It is not because moral rules hold independently of culture but because it is motivated by sentiments that moral rules are treated more seriously than conventional rules.

Yet here a question arises: is it sufficient for the distinction between morality and convention to characterize moral rules as ones whose observance is motivated by sentiments? To give an answer to it, we need to see what motivates us to follow conventional rules.

3.2   Lewisian Convention and Prinzian Morality

The theory of convention proposed by David Lewis[18] is one of the most popular philosophical theories concerning convention. This theory is inspired by game theory and has been influential in the fields of philosophy, sociology, etc. It must be a good starting point to compare moral rules in

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18   See Lewis 1969.

Prinz's theory with Lewisian conventional rules.

The main idea of Lewis is as follows. We often face a situation with which we have to deal in cooperation with others who have the same interests with us. And often there are several ways to deal with the situation, all of them being equally efficient. To give an example, consider traffic. In order to avoid collision and enable smooth traffic, it is necessary that everyone follows a certain lane rule. Notice that it does not matter if this rule requires keeping to the left or the right: what is required is that everyone conforms to the same lane rule, whether it demands driving in the left or the right lane[19]. How is it possible that everyone follows the same rule all together? One obvious way is to establish an explicit rule. We do not, however, always need a stipulated rule for coordination, nor do we actually have such a rule all the time. Sometimes each of us independently decides how to behave on the basis of an expectation of what other people think. If each of us has knowledge on the precedent cases of accomplished coordination, each of us can rationally infer and make the expectation that every other people will follow the precedent. Then each one will decide whether he or she also follow the precedent. We can act in conformity in such a way. That is to say, rational agents can accomplish coordination without explicit rules by inferring each other's intention or expectation and acting accordingly. In the case of traffic, agents may form expectations such as "He will drive on the left", "He may expect that I will drive on the left," etc. and act accordingly. As a result, they will keep following the pattern of keeping to the left even if there is no explicit rule[20].

Lewisian conventional rules are the ones followed on the basis of rational mutual expectations about each others' intention, expectation, and action. Such rules have a character much different from moral rules in Prinz's moral theory. Sure, the purpose of accomplishing coordination among members of a culture is also an important factor for Prinzian moral rules. Nonetheless, the need for coordination is not a motive for obeying moral rules. Nor are expectations about how others will act. What motivate us to act morally are emotions such as anger or shame. Consider that, in general, it is regarded as impermissible to justify a violation of a moral rule for the reason that no one actually keeps that rule. Moral rules should be followed whether any other persons conform to it or not. That is, we follow moral rules not for reasons concerning coordination. This point clearly shows the difference between conventional and moral rules. While the former are followed for the reason that coordination is needed, the latter are followed not for such a reason. Moral rules are obeyed from emotional motivation.

It has been made clear that, although Prinzian morality has a relativistic character, it is different from mere conventional rules. Prinzian morality and Lewisian convention are different in the motivational aspect. Yet, in fact, the Lewisian concept of convention does not apply to all types of convention. There are some conventions that cannot be captured by the Lewisian concept. The concept of *natural convention*, which is defined by Ruth Garrett Millikan, applies to such a kind of convention.

Can the feature of being motivated by sentiments be a criterion of clearly distinguishing mo-

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19   Here, following the pattern of keeping to the left (or right) is *arbitrary* in that the pattern is not necessarily to be followed in order to enable smooth traffic (keeping to the other side is also fine). This point is important in relation to Millikan's natural convention. See 3.4.

20   Ibid., Chs. 1–2.

rality and convention? Although Lewisian convention does not have this feature, there might be a different kind of convention that is motivated by sentiments. If so, moral rules might turn out to be a kind of conventional rules after all. I will assess this possibility in the next section.

3.3   Natural Convention[21]

Millikan defines natural conventions as patterns which are *reproduced* and *proliferated due to weight of precedent*. In the following I will make clear what these two features are like.

First, reproduction is a certain type of the manner in which patterns proliferate. A pattern is reproduced if a new item of that pattern is derived from a previous item or items having in certain respects the same form, such that had the model(s) been different in these respects, the new item would have differed accordingly. Put differently, reproduced patterns counterfactually depend on previous models in certain respects. For example, we have a meal with chopsticks. This pattern of behavior is derived from precedent cases of eating. And if we had had a meal by a folk instead of chopsticks, we would be using a folk. There can be various ways to reproduce patterns other than direct copying, e.g., conveying an explanation about how to make the pattern[22].

Next, for a pattern to be proliferated due to weight of precedent, it is to be proliferated just because of the existence of precedent, not because of some intrinsic features of the pattern. Examples concerning ways of lighting fires are instructive. Imagine following two examples: boy scouts lighting fires and members of some primitive village lighting fires. In our society, several different ways of lighting fires are known, e.g. rubbing two sticks together, using a firestone, or scratching matches, and so on. So lighting fires by rubbing sticks might be done among boy scouts just because there are precedent cases. Conversely, imagine that, in the primitive village, no other way to light fires is known than rubbing sticks. It is not the latter but the former that is a case of proliferation due to weight of precedent. In the latter case, lighting fires by rubbing sticks is repeatedly done because of its beneficial effect, namely causing fires. On the other hand, in the former case people do not have to follow the proliferated pattern to achieve their purpose. There are other ways to perform the same function. Then why do they choose rubbing sticks, instead of using firestones or matches? It is just because they have precedents of rubbing sticks. So we can say that rubbing sticks is proliferated due to weight of precedent. Put generally, In the case of proliferation due to weight of precedent, the proliferated pattern is not necessarily followed for the purpose of performing the function that the pattern can serve. In this point, the proliferated pattern has arbitrariness in relation to function. When a pattern is proliferated due to weight of precedent, the arbitrariness of the pattern in relation to function is *known* to people. If people do not know that there are other patterns, they are proliferating one pattern because it is the only way available for them to perform a certain function. This is the case with lighting fires in the primitive village[23].

Why is a pattern proliferated just because of the existence of precedent? It is because simply following precedent is advantageous in some way. It enables us to save time and effort to think about

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21   For the concept of natural convention, see Millikan 2005. In her theory, this concept is mainly intended as the basis for analysis of language. For the whole structure of Millikanian philosophy, see Millikan 1984.

22   Millikan 2005, pp. 3–4.

23   Ibid., pp. 7–8.

which behavior is to be performed or to invent a new way. Moreover, by following precedent among those around us, we can promote social coordination. Imagine that we have an arational disposition to follow precedent simply. Sometimes it would be better to yield oneself to that disposition than to draw rational inference to decide what to do. Yielding oneself to an arational disposition to follow precedent simply is a strategy that has certain advantages for one's survival. Actually, it is likely that we have evolved to have such a disposition. A pattern of behavior is proliferated due to weight of precedent as people refrain from inferentially choosing what to do and act according to their disposition to follow precedent[24].

In sum, natural conventions are patterns of behavior which are dependent on precedent counterfactually and are proliferated not by behaviors based on rational inference but by behaviors dependent on an arational disposition to follow precedent despite the knowledge of other possible patterns.

In our daily life, we often follow precedent in such a way. That is, knowing that a conventional behavior is arbitrary in relation to its function, still we often follow conventional patterns just because of the existence of precedent. This way of maintaining convention has a practical advantage in that it enables us to cut costs of rational inference. The notion of natural convention captures such a practical aspect of our convention. The notion of Lewisian convention, which is based on rational mutual expectation, misses such a point.

3.4   Natural convention and Prinzian morality

In 3.2, we saw that Prinzian morality is not assimilated to Lewisian convention. The difference is that, while Lewisian convention is maintained by rational mutual expectation, Prinzian morality is not based on rationality. According to Prinz, moral rules are followed due to emotional motivation. But, then, how about convention which is not based on rationality? Relativistic morality might be one kind of such convention. The concept of natural convention is a candidate for the concept of convention which can subsume the Prinzian moral concept, for natural convention is based on *arationality*.

Can Prinzian morality be regarded as a kind of natural convention? To give an answer, we have to see if Prinzian morality is *reproduced* and is *proliferated due to weight of precedent*. As noted above, there can be different ways for reproducing patterns. Can the way to transmit patterns of moral behavior, that is, inculcating moral sentiments through cultural education, be seen as one way of reproduction? And, through this way of transmission, are Prinzian morals proliferated due to weight of precedent?

Let me scrutinize the proliferation process of moral behaviors. According to Prinz, new members of a culture, e.g. children, are imbued with moral sentiments through moral education including manipulation of emotions[25]. For instance, when children behave badly, educators punish them or refuse to show affection to them. In this way they make children connect behaviors they have done to emotions like anger, fear, sadness etc. Consequently, people who have acquired moral sentiments through such education will show anger or contempt toward bad behaviors done by

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24   In Tsutsui 2008, I tried to clarify that the notion of the weight of precedent has such an implication.
25   Prinz 2007, p. 35.

new members. They have now become new moral educators, because moral sentiments they have acquired evoke the emotions such that motivate them to disseminate the sentiments themselves[26]. Then it follows that the mechanism that proliferates patterns of moral behavior is the disposition to disseminate moral sentiments, which is contained in moral sentiments themselves.

Note that, here, weight of precedent or advantage of simply following the precedent is not an effective factor in proliferating patterns of moral behavior. Let me explain.

In order that a pattern may proliferate due to weight of precedent, it is necessary that there are other patterns which performs the same function and that this fact is known to people. In such a situation, the proliferated pattern is arbitrary in that it is not necessary to follow that pattern for the performance of the desired function since other patterns are also available. In other words, people know the arbitrariness of the pattern in relation to function in such a situation. The proliferation of a pattern due to weight of precedent is brought about by people's yielding themselves to a disposition to simply follow a precedent pattern while recognizing the arbitrariness of the pattern in relation to function.

Is it the case with the proliferation of patterns of moral behavior? It is true that, if we adopt moral relativism, there are several options for patterns of moral behavior, for moral relativism entails the claim that a morally good behavior is not uniquely determined even in a particular situation. What is good in a certain situation varies according to cultural background. That is, there can be several alternative patterns of moral behavior to any given one.

We cannot presume, however, that people know other options for morally good behavior. For instance, in our culture most people do not suppose that there are alternatives for moral norms such as "You should not kill others". Sometimes an idea that there are alternatives to such norms is thought to be anti-moral or hampering propagation of moral norms. Moral sentiments motivate us to obey and make others obey certain moral norms. When we try to promote our own moral views, being motivated by moral sentiments, it is not necessary, or rather obstructive, to know that there are other possible moral values.

Now it is made clear what the relativity of Prinzian morality is like. In Prinz's theory, morality is explicitly relative only when viewed from the meta-moral level at which we do not commit ourselves to any particular moral value. For those who commit themselves to any particular moral value, relativity is not necessarily recognized, because of sentimental motivation for the propagation of the very moral value to which they are committed. That is to say, the relativity of Prinzian morality becomes conspicuous only when seen from a meta-moral level.

From the fact that other possible patterns of behavior are not necessarily known, it follows that the proliferation of patterns of moral behavior is not due to weight of precedent. In the case of moral behavior, the proliferation is not due to weight of precedent or the mere existence of precedent, but due to the feature of moral sentiments that motivates us to promote those sentiments.

I have examined the difference between Prinzian morality and convention. Both vary according to cultural difference, but in fact they have somewhat different characters. In the case of convention, an arbitrariness of a pattern in relation to function is known. Namely, people know that there are alternative patterns with the same function. In fact, this is a feature common to Lewisian

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26   Cf. Ibid., p. 120.

convention and natural convention[27]. Consider a situation where several alternative patterns are known. If a certain pattern of behavior is continuously chosen because of rational mutual expectation, that pattern is a Lewisian convention. If a pattern is repeated because of people's arational disposition to follow precedent, the pattern is a natural convention.

In contrast, with morality, it is not necessarily known that there are alternative moral behaviors. This is because the propagation of moral behaviors is motivated by sentiments and such a motive does not accompany nor necessarily need the knowledge of alternative patterns. This point may be related to the fact that we usually take moral rules as more serious than conventional rules. It is likely that the seriousness is due to lack of knowledge about alternative patterns.

4   Conclusion

The similarity and difference between relativistic morality proposed by Prinz and convention can be summarized as follows. Prinzian morality is constructed from moral sentiments of each individual, and these sentiments are acquired through cultural education. Prinzian morality has a socio-cultural character in following two aspects: first, as a matter of fact, culture is deeply related to morality as its cause, its effect, and its raison d'être. Second, some moral concepts such as moral obligation are essentially social in that they presuppose the existence of group of people sharing the same moral values. Thus Prinzian moral theory implies cultural relativism. This is the point common to Prinzian morality and convention.

Despite such commonality, Prinzian morality surely differs from convention in a certain respect. While people following a conventional rule recognize the arbitrariness of the rule in relation to function, people following a moral rule do not necessarily know that the rule is arbitrary in relation to function. This is because moral rules are obeyed from motivation based on moral sentiments, which does not accompany the knowledge of the arbitrariness of the rule in relation to function. We often think of moral rules as more serious than conventional rules. This way of thinking may be results from the lack of the knowledge of alternative rules.

Prinzian morality, Lewisian convention, and natural convention are transmitted and propagated by different mechanisms. Lewisian convention is maintained by rational mutual expectation. Natural convention continues because people adopt a strategy to follow arational disposition to simply reproduce precedents. Prinzian morality is propagated by the self-propagating character of moral sentiments.

We behave culturally in different forms such as conventional behavior or moral behavior. The reason why we behave in such a way cannot be explained simply by innate capacity or benefits for survival. The reason is that a cultural pattern of behaviors has arbitrariness in relation to function. There are different mechanisms for propagating such an arbitrary pattern of behaviors among us, as shown above.

This idea is precisely expressed by Dan Sperber's term *epidemiology of representations*[28]. He explicates the transmission and propagation of a culture as a causal process in which mental and

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27   See 3.2 and Lewis 1969, pp. 74–75.
28   See Sperber 1996, pp. 25–26.

physical representations are transmitted. By the word "epidemiology" Sperber means that there are various ways in which a representation is transmitted and we cannot capture the processes by a single model. This point is contrasted by theories like meme theories[29], in which cultural transmission is modeled as imitation process.

> Because of the ontological heterogeneity of epidemiological phenomena, there is no such thing as a general epidemiological theory. What we find is a variety of different models with greater or lesser generality and a common methodology. Similarly, I very much doubt that we should, in the study of cultural phenomena, aim at a general grand theory[30].

In this paper, I have tried to demonstrate concrete examples of the idea of epidemiology of representations. To investigate intrinsic characters of the cultural aspect of humans, it is important to recognize the variety of our cultural phenomenon and give them some efficient models.

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29   For meme theories, see Aunger 2000; Blackmore 1999; Dawkins 1982; 2006. In Sperber 2000, Sperber criticizes meme theorists that cultural transmission should not be modeled only by an imitation model.

30   Sperber 1996, p. 26.