The Moral Instinct

How do we decide what is the right thing to do?

Are our decisions objective?

How are moral judgements different from other opinions on how people ought to behave?

1. Moral prohibitions, for example are deemed to be universal and not due to local customs

   Ex: okay to say "I don't like beets, but don't care if you eat them"
   NOT okay to say "I don't like killing, but don't care if you murder someone"

2. We feel that those who commit immoral acts deserve to be punished

   Ex: it is not only allowable to punish someone, but it is WRONG to "let them get away with it"

I. Flipping the moralization switch

-culture wars consist of moralization or amoralization of particular kinds of behavior

   Some moved away from personal choice to moral outrage

- 2nd Hand Smoke

-Plastic or Paper

-Diet
Other behaviors have been amoralized, from moral failings to lifestyle choices 
- Divorce

- Illegitimacy

- Working mothers

- Homosexuality

II. Reasoning & Rationalizing

- Content our moral judgements is often questionable

- So too are the lines of reasoning that lead us to adopt them

A. Moral reasoning: Kohlberg View

- Moral conclusions are consequence of deliberate, rational reasoning

  Preconventional:
  - Child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of wrong/right;

  - Physical consequences determine wrongness or rightness of action
    Ex: reciprocity, "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"

  Conventional:
  - Maintaining expectation of one's group, family, or nation is important, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences
    Ex: My country, right or wrong
Post-Conventional
-universal moral principles supercede particular laws and conventions. choice is based on the principles that supercede convention

EX: Kohlberg Scenario: says we come to moral judgement after reasoned process
-Heinz Dilemma- robbing drugstore

B). Moral rationalization: we begin with conclusion, prompted by emotion, then concoct justification

Haidt Scenarios

- Julie & Mark- incest example

-Dog

C. Trolley Problem: moral.wjh.harvard.edu/index2.html

Trolley experiment is chance to directly test Kohlberg's & Haidt's Theories:

Does rational deliberation give rise to moral principles?( Kohlberg) or do moral judgements arise intuitively from unconscious processes ( Haidt)

Data on judgements from Hauser site:
- 90% of subjects say Pulling switch is permissible
- 10% say pushing man is permissible

Subjects were unable to come up with consistent moral justification for both scenarios- providing evidence for intuitive view.
Does this mean Kohlberg is completely wrong?

Classic trolley scenario looks at only one proposed philosophical rationale: it is more permissible to inflict harm as the side-effect of achieving a goal (throwing switch) than as a means of achieving the goal (pushing man) INTENTION PRINCIPLE

In other scenarios, subjects were able to articulate sufficient justifications -actively doing harm (active euthanasia in administering lethal injection of toxic compounds) vs. passively allowing harm (allow a life to end by not administering drugs to prevent build-up of toxic compounds) ACTION PRINCIPLE

D. Brain Imaging:

1). Cohen Experiment:

Introduction:

-In trolley experiment, "no one consistent, readily accessible moral principles that captures people's intuitions"

-Hypothesized difference is that pushing man off bridge (action principle) engages emotions to degree that other doesn't.

General Hypothesis about Moral Judgements: difference in emotional engagement produced by scenarios affect people's judgements

Predictions:
1. Brain areas associated with emotion would be more active during Action Dilemmas

2. longer reaction times in which the subjects' response is incongruent with emotional one (say Yes to footbridge)
Methods:
- 60 moral dilemmas, divided into moral and non-moral categories
- Moral dilemmas coded for moral/personal vs. moral/impersonal qualities
- Participants judged actions proposed as "appropriate" or "inappropriate"
- 9 subjects given moral dilemma scenarios while in fMRI

Results:

- **Experiment 1: Activity**
  - Moral/personal condition: medial frontal gyrus, posterior cingulate gyrus, angular gyrus, bilateral
  - Moral/impersonal & non-Moral: areas associated with working memory (parietal lobe, middle frontal gyrus)

- **Experiment 2: Reaction Time**
  - People were slower in responding "appropriate" in moral/personal condition
  - In other conditions, longer reaction time to say inappropriate

Conclusions:
- Interference effect, seen in reaction time measure, suggests that "increased emotional involvement in moral/personal have an influence on and are not merely incidental to moral judgements.

- Moral/impersonal fits with Action Principle scenarios: subjects can articulate justifications and seem to involve conscious reasoning
  - Increased activation in dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (involved in problem solving and abstract thought)

- Moral/personal fits with Intention Principle: scenarios where subjects can't articulate justifications
  - Increased activation in orbitofrontal cortex and temporal pole (
involved in emotions)

2). Brain damage and Moral Judgements:
- subjects with damage in ventromedial prefrontal cortex

- deficits in emotional processing

- asked to judge moral dilemma scenarios
  - in intention scenarios, responded same as control subjects
  - in action scenarios, responded in utilitarian way (lack emotional aversion to pushing a man in front of a train)

- suggests that emotions play a critical role in shaping moral judgements

- contribute to sense of morally impermissible acts

- these gut reactions compete against rational principles and learned moral rules

III. A Universal Morality

- Results from Trolley Experiments, etc led Marc Hauser to postulate presence of "Moral Instinct"

  - like language instinct, "we are born with a universal moral grammar that forces us to analyze human action in terms of its moral structure, with no conscious awareness of rules in play"

A). Evidence

1. List of Universal moral concepts and emotions:
   - distinction between right and wrong
   - empathy
   - fairness
   - admiration of generosity
   - rights and obligations
- proscription of murder, rape, and other forms of violence
- redress of wrongs
- sanctions for wrongs against community
- shame
- taboos

2. Moral Sense and Biology
- Developmental Milestones
  - kids spontaneously offer toys and comfort
  - have sense of distinction between societal conventions & moral principles (not OK to wear PJs to school or to hit a girl for no reason; but asked if either would be OK if teacher allowed them, most said wearing PJs OK, but hitting a girl still not)

- "genes" for morality: personality traits "conscientiousness" & "agreeableness" more related in identical twins raised apart than in adopted siblings raised together

- Psychopathy - may have genetic predisposition

- Damasio, et al: children with damage to frontal lobes grow up to be callous, irresponsible adults (lie, steal, ignore punishment, endanger children, can't think through simplest moral dilemma)

YET, moral grammar can't be all that Universal.

Hypothesis: moral grammar is a blueprint, with abstract spec sheet

B). Basic Moral Themes

cbdr.cmu.edu/seminar/Haidt.pdf

1. Harm

2. Fairness

3. Community (group loyalty)
4. Authority

5. Purity

-Violations of a theme lead to sense of moral wrong

-themes are ubiquitous

-themes have deep evolutionary roots:
  avoidance of harm seen in hungry monkeys who won't pull chain to get food if it harms other monkey

  respect for authority seen in pecking orders/dominance hierarchies

  purity/defilement taps emotion of disgust seen in potential disease vectors like bodily effluvia, rotting flesh, etc

  fairness maps onto reciprocal altruism

  community maps onto nepotistic altruism( common interest- family or kinship metaphors( fraternites, fatherland)

C). Cultures Vary in Ranking of Themes

Western : violations of Harm & Fairness paramount, in business & government should trump community( nepotism)
Japanese: nonconformity is worst
Hindus, Orthodox Jews: Purity violations high
Muslims: authority( outrage at insulting the Prophet)

Ranking & Placement of Moral spheres divides liberals & Conservatives
-web survey By Haidt

Liberals: more weight on harm & fairness, play down group loyalty, authority & purity

Conservatives: moderately high ranking on all five