

Reading Guide Empirically-informed Responses

Readings for 1 March 2011

READINGS (REQUIRED)

- [A] Cass Sunstein, “Moral Heuristics” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28 (2005), pp. 531-542 (V*2)
- [B] Joshua Greene, “The cognitive neuroscience of moral judgment” (manuscript) (2009), pp. 1-21, 25-27. Forthcoming in Gazzaniga ed., *The Cognitive Neurosciences IV* (V*2)

READINGS (RECOMMENDED)

- [C] Tamler Sommers, Interview with Josh Greene and Liane Young, “Trolley Problems” in *A Very Bad Wizard: Morality Behind the Curtain* (2009), pp. 131-150. (V*2)
- [D] Fiery Cushman and Liane Young, “The Psychology of Dilemmas and the Philosophy of Morality” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12 (2009), pp. 9-24 (V*2)

[A] Cass Sunstein, “Moral Heuristics” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28 (2005), pp. 531-542 (V*2)

Background

Cass Sunstein (1954 –) is a professor of Law and Political Science who taught for many years at the University of Chicago. He is currently a member the Obama administration, on leave from his position as Professor of Law at Harvard Law School. His numerous books and articles address a wide range of topics centering on issues of economics, justice, and political theory.

The essay we are reading was originally published in 2005 in the journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, together with responses from some forty scientists and philosophers, and a reply by Sunstein. In it, Sunstein considers the philosophical implications of psychological and neuroscientific research that appears to suggest that much of our moral decision-making arises from our use of mental rules of thumb.

Later this semester, we will be reading selections from Sunstein's co-authored popular book *Nudge*.

Passages to focus on/passages to skim

Please read the target article in full (531-542).

If you would like, read as much of the Open Peer Commentary as seems interesting (542-565), as well as (if you would like) Sunstein's response (565-570.)

The bibliography can be found on 570-573.

Terms, Concepts, and Examples

Be sure that you understand how Sunstein is using the following terms, concepts and examples:

Terms and Concepts: heuristics, the insistent homunculus, attribute substitution

Examples: Linda the bankteller, the Asian disease problem, automobile company cost-benefit analysis, emissions trading, betrayals, corporate wrongdoers, human cloning, incest prohibitions, physician-assisted suicide, trolley problem

Reading Questions:

As you read through the selection, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) How is Sunstein's distinction between "heuristics" and "full cognition" related to similar divisions we have seen this semester (e.g., alief/belief, System I/II)?
- (2) Why might natural selection favor certain heuristics?
- (3) What are some of the moral intuitions that Sunstein suggests arise from the application or misapplication of heuristics?
- (4) What implications, if any, do you think Sunstein's analysis has for traditional moral theorizing?

[B] Joshua Greene, "The cognitive neuroscience of moral judgment" (2009), especially pp. 1-21, 25-26 (V*2)

Background

Joshua Greene is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. He started his academic career in philosophy, receiving a philosophy BA at Harvard and a philosophy PhD at Princeton. He was a pioneer in using neuroimaging techniques to investigate moral cognition, and was a graduate advisor to Fiery Cushman and Liane Young (who are represented in the recommended readings for today).

The reading for today is a recently published book chapter reviewing "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Moral Judgment." In it, Greene summarizes the history and current state of the field, including some of his own research in this area.

Passages to focus on/passages to skim

Please read pages 1-21 and from the bottom of 25-27. If you would like, read pages 21-25.

Try to get a sense of the general argument that Greene is making, but don't worry too much about the details of the neuroanatomy.

Terms, Concepts, and Examples

Be sure that you understand how Greene is using the following terms, concepts and examples:

Terms and Concepts: VMPFC, amygdala, psychopathy, anti-social personality disorder (APD), “personal”/“impersonal” dilemma, dual-process morality, means/side-effect,

Examples: switch (Bystander)/footbridge (Fat Man) cases; crying baby case

Reading Questions

- (1) What do we learn about the nature of moral cognition from studies of people with damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC)?
- (2) What do we learn about the nature of moral cognition from studies of people with damage to emotional-processing parts of their brains (e.g., amygdala)?
- (3) What do we learn about the nature of moral cognition from Greene’s neuroimaging studies of the Trolley Problem?
- (4) [OPT: What have we learned from neuroeconomics studies that we didn’t know from (non-imaging) behavioral economic studies?]
- (5) What does Greene conclude about the nature of the brain’s “moral faculty”?

[C] Tamler Sommers, Interview with Josh Greene and Liane Young, “Trolley Problems” in *A Very Bad Wizard: Morality Behind the Curtain* (2009), pp. 131-150. (V*2)

Background

Tamler Sommers is an Assistant Professor in the Philosophy department at the University of Houston. The selection we are reading is from his new book, *A Very Bad Wizard: Morality Behind the Curtain*, which is a lively collection of interviews with great relevance to this course. In addition to the interview with Joshua Greene and Liane Young, it includes interviews with other familiar names (e.g., Jonathan Haidt) as well as thinkers such as primatologist Frans de Waal (famous for looking at some of the building blocks of human morality that can be found in nonhuman primates).

This is an easy-to-read piece that I suspect you will find very enjoyable.

[D] Fiery Cushman and Liane Young, “The Psychology of Dilemmas and the Philosophy of Morality” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12 (2009), pp. 9-24 (V*2)

Background

Starting July 2011, Fiery Cushman will be an assistant professor at the Brown University Department of Cognitive, Linguistic and Psychological Sciences. He is currently a postdoctoral

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researcher at Harvard, where he also received his PhD. His research focuses on the cognitive science of moral judgment.

Starting July 2011, Liane Young will be an assistant professor at the Boston College Psychology Department. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at MIT, following a PhD from Harvard. Her research focuses on the cognitive science of moral judgment.

Reading Questions:

As you read through the selection, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) How does “Multi-System Moral Psychology” differ from earlier approaches to moral psychology?
- (2) What do the authors claim about the parallel between conflicting moral cognitions and conflicting moral theories?
- (3) What do the authors argue is the philosophical import of moral psychology?

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