

MORAL INTUITIONS

1. Definitions

- a) Moral intuition: a noninferential judgement
- b) Not morally relevant: too hard to characterise this from scratch. For the purposes of this talk, we can simply take it that if none of the many varied moral traditions would regard a factor as morally relevant it is not morally relevant.

2. Three types of moral intuition; each type has its defenders.

- a) About act tokens such as x did y at time t (Shafer-Landau, Copp, (Dancy and reasons)).
- b) About act types, e.g. making a promise, (Ross (but Audi is not so sure that Ross fits the bill)).
- c) About an ultimate principle, e.g. utilitarianism (Sidgwick).

3. Two principal uses of intuitions about act tokens in moral theory.

- a) To discredit consequentialism, e.g. Magistrate and the Mob, Jim and the Indians.
- b) To support or revise mid-level principles such as the doctrines of double effect and of doing and allowing e.g. the trolley case and transplant case, the fat-man variant.

4. Reflective equilibrium: the theory

- a) Wide reflective equilibrium a popular method in moral philosophy following the work of Rawls.
- b) WRE is not intuitionism although sophisticated modern intuitionism has some similarities with it e.g. defeasibility of intuitions (Daniels); nor is use of the method confined to those who believe in a coherence theory of justification (Sayre-McCord).
- c) The method involves working back and forward between considered judgements about cases and moral principles, revising judgements at each level to fit others in which we have more confidence:
- d) intuitions about act tokens are not privileged in this theory (Daniels/Rawls 1971 vs. Rawls 1951)
- e) The method requires intuitions that are stable and produced in favourable conditions.

5. Intuition-mongering: the practice

- a) Proponents of mid-level principles treat certain intuitions as ones in which they have a tremendous amount of confidence (trolley cases, Foot, Thomson). The principles are to fit these cases; there is no prospect that the judgements about cases might be revised to fit a principle.
- b) Consequentialists generally seize one or both of two horns of a dilemma about intuitions: either intuitions about cases are to be rejected outright (but is consequentialism itself established by a different kind of intuition and if so is that any more trustworthy?); or consequentialism is shown to be compatible with these intuitions after all.
- c) Is there a case for using intuitions about act tokens that does not treat them as privileged but does not reject them outright? It is not easy to make this case.

6. Framing effects (Sinnott-Armstrong)

- a) A word framing effect is produced by the description of the act token; a context framing effect is produced by aspects of the context in which the act token is presented.
- b) Word framing effects affect the Bystander at the Switch case. Kill and Save variants produce contradictory responses.
- c) Context framing effects affect sequences of trolley case variants too.

7. Morally irrelevant factors (Unger)

- a) Projective separating and grouping affect intuitions about harming one to prevent harm to many.
- b) Futility thinking: when we projectively group a few needy people with many who need help we are less likely to aid the few.
- c) Physical force: harder to justify diverting a stationary bomb than a moving bomb. We can vary intuitions about the fat-man case by varying the movement used to place him in front of the tram.

8. Meeting the challenge: framing effects

a) Framing effects less likely to affect small numbers, definite rather than probable effects, fully described cases, sequences of very different rather than similar cases.

9. Meeting the challenge: how do morally irrelevant factors distort?

a) We can use moral principles to identify whether it is the presence of a morally irrelevant factor which distorts an intuition or its absence. Our moral common sense endorses a principle that shows that it is projective separating which distorts, not projective grouping (Unger).

b) What if our moral common sense tell us never to infringe the right to life intentionally or actively? Then it would be projective grouping that distorts. (Lewis)

c) Dispute is pushed up one level of generality. Dialectical problem: what use are intuitions then?

10. Meeting the challenge: favourable conditions for belief in general.

a) Moral intuitions fail five tests that some non-moral beliefs pass (Sinnott-Armstrong).

b) Partiality. It is in our interests to have better-off help us and not to help those needier than us.

c) Disagreement. Between cultures, eras and individuals. Between students about thought experiments, even the Bystander at the Switch, the fat-man variant and Magistrate and the Mob.

d) Emotion. The problem is prior emotion not appropriately produced emotion. Hypnosis case.

e) Illusion. See framing effects and morally irrelevant factors.

f) Disreputable origins. Our culture reflects power of rich and men, allegedly. Note that it is not enough that a belief's origins are disreputable; it must be corrupted too. (Bernard Williams test).

11. Implications for WRE

a) We must adopt greater caution with respect to one input, moral intuitions about act tokens.

b) We must admit another input, knowledge of framing effects and morally irrelevant factors.

Reading List

Framing effects and distorting factors

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2006) *Moral Skepticisms*. Oxford University Press.

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (ms) Framing Moral Intuitions

Unger, P. (1996) *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*. Oxford University Press.

Reflective equilibrium

Daniels, N. (1996) *Justice and Justification: Reflective Equilibrium in Theory and Practice*. CUP.

Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press.

Sayre-McCord (1996) Coherentist Epistemology and Moral Theory IN Sinnott-Armstrong, W. & Timmons, M. eds. *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*. OUP.