The Moral Psychology Handbook

Justin E. Lane & Nora Parren

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Book reviews

The Moral Psychology Handbook
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Moral psychology is a growing interdisciplinary field that combines moral philosophy and psychology, asking questions such as, "how do people form moral judgments?" and "what motivates moral action?" The answers are complex, but *The moral psychology handbook* tackles these questions and others in a collection of 13 argumentative essays, drawing on empirical fact and ethical theory. The volume is the result of the semiannual meetings of the Moral Psychology Research Group and expresses the voices and ideas of leading researchers who sometimes hold contradictory ideas about the topics addressed. This is embraced by the editors and makes each collaboratively authored chapter useful and interesting by itself, but particularly in conversation with the chapters and authors in the rest of the volume. Without attempting to tackle every topic in contemporary moral psychology, the handbook is impressive in both scope and depth. The volume addresses many theoretical debates and broad moral psychological models, but also includes chapters addressing specific aspects of moral philosophy, such as responsibility, reasoning, intuition, and judgment.

Chapter 1 discusses the philosophical implications of the claim that morality evolved. Machery and Mallon look at three interpretations of the claim: (1) that some components of moral psychology evolved; (2) that normative cognition is the product of evolution; and (3) that moral cognition, understood as a special type of normative cognition, evolved. Their ultimate aim is to test the weight of empirical evidence in relation to philosophical implications of evolution and morality. They find that the first two interpretations, while reasonably well supported, are not of deep philosophical interest. The third interpretation would be deeply philosophically interesting, but there is little support for this interpretation.

Cushman, Young, and Greene (chapter 2) argue that despite the long history of debate in philosophy of whether moral judgments are based in intuition or in rationality, actual reasoning is the product of both psychological systems. They provide a wide range of evidence from brain imaging, psychophysiology, and diverse cognitive methodologies to support their dual-process model. The chapter focuses on moral judgments of physical harm while acknowledging that this is only one of many subcomponents of moral psychology. They argue that the intuitive/affect process deals largely with intentional harm and the conscious/cognitive process deals with welfare maximization.

The authors suspect that these two processes will eventually be understood as part of a "larger constellation of psychological systems that enable the human capacity for moral judgment" (p. 49) and conclude by offering avenues for further research.

Schroeder, Roskies, and Nichols (chapter 3) give an in-depth analysis of four philosophical stances concerning moral motivation and the neurophysiological evidence that may implicate these stances. They present and analyze caricatures of what they refer to as the instrumentalist, cognitivist, sentimentalist, and personalist theories about morally worthy motivation. Briefly, the instrumentalist is motivated when s/he forms beliefs concerning how to satisfy pre-existing desires. The cognitivist begins with occurrent beliefs about what action is morally right. The sentimentalist is motivated by emotions. For the personalist, morally worthy action stems from good character and knowledge of what is good. The chapter gives a lengthy overview of relevant neurophysiological evidence that may have implications for these philosophical stances and discusses what support and complications arise from the evidence. The authors suggest that the instrumentalist and personalist stories fit best with their neuroscientific picture. This chapter is also interesting in the context of subsequent chapters that look at situational influences on moral decision making, such as chapter 11, "Character."

Chapter 4, by Prinz and Nichols, investigates the role of emotions in moral judgment. Of particular interest, the chapter makes a point of defining morality without succumbing to the circularity of relying on the concept of "moral" or some obfuscation thereof. The authors distinguish moral and non-moral emotions in line with Turiel's moral/conventional distinction and make the contention that anger and guilt are central to moral judgment. The chapter reviews and critiques existing theories and models of moral emotion and judgment. It also furthers the discussion by giving a very precise overview of the roles of anger and guilt, and by offering connections and delineations between other areas of moral psychology involving punishment, cooperation, and shame.

Chapter 5 assesses the evidence for psychological and evolutionary altruism. Stich, Doris, and Roedder begin with a review of the philosophical treatments of the subject, including egoism, hedonism, and true altruism, but also look at the related but separate evolutionary and social psychological treatments of altruism. They discuss work in experimental psychology from the past three decades, particularly the evolutionary framework of Sober and Wilson and the social psychological work of Batson and colleagues. The authors argue that an appeal to evolutionary theory is inconclusive for the philosophical debate but offer praise for the empirical methods that are becoming utilized in the field.

In chapter 6, Harmon, Mason, and Sinnot-Armstrong provide an overview of what moral reasoning consists of and present the deductivist model of moral reasoning. The authors argue that the assumptions underlying the deductive model are flawed in that (1) they conflate inferences with arguments and the former do not do the required work of moral justification, (2) the premises may be related in a more complicated way to the moral conclusion than the deductive model supposes, (3) experimental results suggest that moral beliefs are not always based on moral principles, and (4) the classical view of concepts that the deductive model relies on is questionable.

The authors offer the reflective equilibrium model as one possible alternative, while conceding that balance in the model is fragile.

In the next chapter, Sinnot-Armstrong, Young, and Cushman tackle moral intuitions, noting that philosophers have historically asked normative questions, while psychologists asked descriptive questions. They are interested in how moral intuitions work and propose that moral intuitions may be the result of heuristics, which often rely on attribute substitution. For example, the target "moral wrongness" may be subconsciously substituted with a more readily accessible attribute in the environment, such as the presence of harm. When these sorts of attributes are present, it is generally reliable to assume that the target is also present. Heuristic attribute substitutions, while fast and frugal, are also subject to error. The authors give an operationalization of moral intuitions compatible with psychological inquiry, and then give a concise overview of the heuristics and biases research programs. The chapter concludes by stating that if moral intuitions do arise from heuristics, then (1) philosophers cannot make claims of direct insight into moral properties, (2) philosophers may not be able to trust the reliability of moral intuitions, and (3) consequentialist arguments are resilient against falsification by counter-example, since it can be argued that those moral intuitions are heuristic substitutions for the target attribute, "best consequence."

Chapter 8 moves on to discuss universal moral grammar. The analogy between linguistics and moral theory has become a topic of intense debate and this chapter may offer one of the clearest, most approachable presentations of the subject. Roedder and Harman present overviews and examples of the Chomskian concept of I-grammar and its analogy, "I-morality." The chapter includes a discussion of moral structural descriptions, recursive embedding, and the often misunderstood difference between competence and performance. Perhaps the most useful question raised by generative moral grammar concerns the unit of analysis for moral theory: is it an individual's I-grammar or the moral conventions of a group? Given the method- ological individualism of cognitive psychology and generalizations drawn by moral psychologists and philosophers, this may be a very important point of inquiry as the field progresses.

In chapter 9, Mallon and Nichols discuss the role of moral rules in the psychological process of moral judgment and offer a critique of Haidt's model of moral intuition, presenting empirical evidence that they believe brings his model into question. They also present counterexamples to critique Blaire's violence inhibition mechanism (VIM) and Greene's dual- process approach. The authors propose that moral rules most parsimoniously fill those gaps and therefore suggest that a "dual-vector" (not dual-process) model may describe non-utilitarian moral judgment.

Knobe and Doris (chapter 10) address the way people make judgments of responsibility, both theoretically and in practice. Philosophers often hold invariantist assumptions when examining these issues, i.e., they assume that people should apply the same criteria at all times when making judgments of moral responsibility. However, Knobe and Doris present empirical evidence that people make consistently variantist judgments based on a number of factors, including the moral status of the behavior, the relationship between the judge and agent, and the agent's moral ignorance. The authors suggest, among other things, that it may be fruitful to look at

judgments of moral praise and of moral blame separately, rather than adhering to an invariantist position in either prescriptive or descriptive work.

Chapter 11 looks at the empirical evidence concerning the role of character in moral actions. It outlines a corpus of evidence and shows that moral actions are often heavily influenced by the subject's situation, which draws into question the subject's rational control and the utility of his/her reflective moral commitments, though the authors do propose ameliorative projects that can help us automatically and consciously act in accordance with our perceptions of our own character. In the end, Merritt, Doris, and Harman conclude that the Aristotelian assumptions concerning character are questionable given the psychological evidence.

Chapter 12 connects positive psychology research programs to moral psychology, focusing in particular on the role of well-being, how it can be defined as an empirical subject of study, and how it can then be measured. Tiberius and Plakias outline and critique the hedonistic, eudaimonic, and life satisfaction theories, particularly advocating their "values-based life-satisfaction" theory.

The final chapter of the book applies moral psychology specifically to the topic of race. Kelly, Machery, and Mallon outline the normative doctrines of eliminativism, which holds that we should do away with racial categories altogether, and conservativism, which holds that we should eliminate such categories only insofar as they promote social discrimination. They outline empirical evidence showing a disconnect between explicit beliefs of racial equality and lingering implicit biases that nonetheless affect behaviors and judgments. As neither eliminativism nor conservativism take psychological factors into account, the authors do not support either normative doctrine.

Taken together, these chapters offer a comprehensive—but not exhaustive—overview of the current debates in moral psychology. We highly recommend this book to philosophers and psychologists interested in increasing their knowledge of the field. *The moral psychology handbook* does great justice to the emerging interdisciplinary work of moral psychologists and philosophers.

Justin E. Lane
Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology
University of Oxford
64 Banbury Rd.
Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 6PN, UK
Email: justin.lane@spc.ox.ac.uk

Nora Parren
Institute of Cognition and Culture
The Queen's University, Belfast
2-4 Fitzwilliam St.
Belfast BT7 1NN, UK
Email: n.parren@qub.ac.uk