Foundations of Mind

Morality

Professors Lisa Feigenson & Justin Halberda

2 Types of Moral Questions

1) Moral action:
   Why do we act the way we do?
   Why don’t we lie more? Cheat more? Steal more?

2) Moral action:
   Why do we judge some actions as right or as wrong?
   What is the origin of contempt? Shame? Guilt?

History of Studying Morality

- Ethnographic studies of the game of marbles
- Clinical interviews about the rules of the game
- Rules of marbles synecdoche for rules of society

Findings:
- Ages 2-4: parallel play only
- Ages 5-8: competitive play according to fixed set of unchanging rules agreed on by all
- Ages 9 and up: competitive play sometimes guided by new rules… Discussion of new rules took up as much time as the play
Egocentrism

Egocentrism is a hallmark of preoperational thought.

Perceiving the world solely from one’s own point of view

My dad’s a fireman.

He puts out fires.

Well, I’m 4 years old.

I like ice cream cake.

Stages:
- Sensorimotor (birth-2yr)
- Preoperational (2-7yr)
- Concrete Operational (7-12yr)
- Formal Operational (12-adult)

Book, “The moral judgement of the child” 1932

Piaget’s Moral Dilemma #1:

A little girl called Sarah is in her room. She is called to dinner. She goes into the dining room. But behind the door was a chair, and on the chair there was a tray with fifteen cups on it. Sarah couldn’t have known that there was all this behind the door. She goes in, the door knocks against the tray, bang go the fifteen cups and they all get broken.

History of Studying Morality

Piaget’s Moral Dilemma #1b:

Once there was a little girl whose name was Beth. One day when her mother was out she tried to get some cookies out of the cupboard. She climbed up onto a chair and stretched out her arm. But the cookies were too high up and she couldn’t reach them and have any. But while she was trying to get down she knocked over a cup. The cup fell down and broke.

E: “Where do the rules of marbles come from?”
C (age 5): “From God.”
C (age 5): “From my father.”
C (age 6): “They’ve just always been there.”

E: “Can the rules of marbles be changed?”
C (age 8 and below): “No.”
C (age 9 and above): “Yes, if all of the players agree.”
History of Studying Morality

Was Sarah naughty? Was Beth naughty?

Were they equally naughty, or was one worse than the other?

Findings:
- Children 7 or younger say Sarah was naughtier
- Weigh extent of damage, but not intentions (6 year olds are consequentialists)

Piaget’s Moral Dilemma #2:

Once there was a little boy named John. One day in school he dipped the braids of the little girl in front of him in ink and the ink got all over her blouse. The teacher told him that if he did this again, he would have to stay after school and that his mother would have to be told. When he got home, his mother asked him how his day was and he said: “Great. My teacher said he wished all the children were just like me.”

Piaget’s Moral Dilemma #2b:

Once there was a little boy named Henry. Henry was very afraid of dogs. One day, when he walking home from school, there was a little dachshund playing on the sidewalk. Henry crossed the street to avoid it, returning to the same side a block later. When he got home, his mother asked him how his day was and he said: “Great. I saw a dog the size of a cow and I went up and patted it.”

Did John tell a lie? Did Henry tell a lie?

Which lie was worse?

Findings:
- < 5 or 6 years:
  - C: “Henry’s lie is worse”
  - E: Why?
  - C: “Because there couldn’t be a dog as big as a cow”
  - (ie, a lie = a false statement, so something that couldn’t be true is more false than something that could), John could have been a good boy in school, he just wasn’t)
- > 6 or 7 years:
  - Say that John’s lie is worse, because it’s intended to deceive
  - “The mother wouldn’t believe Henry, because she knows there couldn’t be a dog as big as a cow.”
  - (ie, a lie = intentional misinformation)
History of Studying Morality

Piaget: 2 Moralities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heteronomous</th>
<th>Autonomous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Moral rules come from authorities</td>
<td>• Come from within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unchangeable</td>
<td>• Play societal role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflect objective damage</td>
<td>• Weigh intentions heavily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not reflect intentions</td>
<td>• Arise in later school years (age 7-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Held through early school years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kohlberg’s (1978) extensions of Piaget’s work:

• Heinz’ moral dilemma
• Tested with all ages, all settings (schools, prisons, seminaries)
• Scored not for moral vs. immoral judgments, but for justifications

Heinz’s Dilemma

• Heinz’s wife is dying from cancer
• Local pharmacist has a drug that might save her, but it costs $4000
• Heinz has no money, so asks if he can buy it for $2000 (all he’s got)
• Pharmacist says no
• That night, feeling desperate, Heinz breaks into pharmacy to steal the drug for his wife

Q: Was what Heinz did wrong or right?
Q: Do you think Heinz should have stolen the drug?
Q: Why?

Answers fall into 6 categories:

Stage 1: Punishment & obedience orientation
“He should not steal it, because he will go to jail.”

Stage 2: Exchange orientation (Tit-for-tat)
“He should not steal it, because it still won’t be his fault if his wife dies.”

Stage 3: Interpersonal conformity (“Good girl, nice boy”)
“If you steal it, you’ll bring dishonor to your family; you won’t be able to face anyone.”

Stage 4: Social system (“Law and Order”) orientation
“He shouldn’t steal it, because if everyone did that there would be chaos everywhere.”

Stage 5: Individual rights orientation (Social contract for greater good)
“Heinz should steal the drug because everyone has the right to life regardless of the law against stealing. Should Heinz be caught and prosecuted for stealing then the law (against stealing) needs to be reinterpreted because a person’s life is at stake.”

Stage 6: Universal ethical principles
“He should steal it because we should treat others as ourselves, and preserving life is a higher principle than preserving property”
Heinz’s dilemma

Kohlberg’s findings on development of moral reasoning

1) Cross-sectional data—older children tend to score in a higher stage
2) Longitudinal data—if tested in successive years, individual children always show progress
3) Children don’t skip stages
4) Children can paraphrase reasoning in their own stage and in lower stages (although they think the answers of children in lower stages are funny) but distort reasoning from higher stages into their own

Piaget & Kohlberg’s position:

- No core knowledge of morality-- no innate moral concepts
- Morality built from experience in social world
- Takes years to assemble structure of moral knowledge
- Early on, no moral/conventional distinction; This too is built from experience
History of Studying Morality

Critique of Kohlberg (& Piaget)

- Change not so discontinuous; people reason in different “stages” given different situations
- Kohlberg initially tested only boys… do girls reason differently?
  - Kohlberg’s highest stages valued individual rights & liberty
  - Females tend to value empathy, responsibility for others
- Only applies to modern, Western cultures?
- Can only ask about kids old enough to follow story & respond verbally… Any evidence for morality at a young age??

Prosocial Behavior

Anecdote from Hoffman (1976):

Michael, 15 months, is struggling with his friend Paul over a toy. Paul starts to cry. Michael appears concerned and lets go of the toy so Paul has it. But Paul continues to cry. Michael pauses, then gives his own teddy bear to Paul; Paul continues crying. Michael pauses again, runs to the next room, gets Paul’s security blanket, and gives it to him. Paul stops crying.

Prosocial Behavior

Even young children might demonstrate precursors to morality:

Observations of toddlers & preschoolers:
- Physical comfort (pats, hugs)
- Verbal comfort (“It’s ok.”)
- Verbal advice (“Be careful.”)
- Helping (puts on Band-aid, gives bottle to baby)
- Other (gets mom to retrieve baby’s rattle, attempts distraction)

Prosocial Behavior

- Very young children show distress at others’ distress… Selfish? Maybe.
- Sympathy: showing concern for another’s distress
- Emotional Contagion: when one baby cries, they all start crying is this morally relevant, or is it an innate amoral safety trigger? We know little of the internal emotions of an infant
Early Helping Detection

- Hamlin, Wynn & Bloom 2007
- 6 month olds and 10 month olds watch a helper and a hinderer

When given the chance to touch or pick up one, they pick up the helper.
Slightly older infants will respond correctly if you ask them verbally “which one was nice” or “which one was mean”

In-Group Out-Group

- Kinzler, Dupoux & Spelke 2007
- 10 month olds watch movies of people speaking
- Then are allowed to take a stuffed animal from one of the speakers

10 month olds prefer to take a toy from someone who speaks their Native Language.
In-Group Out-Group

• Kinzler, Dupoux & Spelke 2007
• 5-6 month olds watch movies of people speaking
• Then are given a choice to look at one or the other
• 5-6 month olds prefer to look at someone who speaks their Native Language over a) someone speaking in Reverse, c) someone speaking a Foreign Language, and d) someone speaking their Native Language but with an Accent
• 5-6 month olds show no preference when the faces are replaced by moving geometric shapes indicating that this is specific to people

**Method**

| a | Silent Baseline |
| b | Non-native/ Unnatural Speech |
| c | Native/ Natural Speech |
| d | Silent Test Trial |

**Time ->**

---

In-Group Out-Group

• Kinzler, Dupoux & Spelke 2007
• 5 year olds watch movies of kids speaking
• Then are asked who they would like to have as a friend

**Method**

There are many different kinds of animals at the zoo

Il y’a beaucoup d’animaux différents au zoo

“Whom would you like to have as your friend?”

---

In-Group Out-Group

• Kinzler, Dupoux & Spelke 2007
• 5 year olds choose the child who speaks their Native Language over a child who speaks a Foreign Language and show the exact same preference when both kids speak their Native Language but one kid speaks with an Accent. Kids don’t want to be friends with someone who has an Accent!