

Do we have any good reasons to trust our moral intuition?

We do not have any good reasons to trust our moral intuitions due to their susceptibility to emotional influence, and the suspect origin of human sentiment. Nevertheless, relying on moral intuition is unavoidable.

This argument will first explain how moral intuitions play into moral judgements, then present both psychological and philosophical evidence for their untrustworthy nature. Finally I will argue that incorporating rational deliberation into moral decision-making will mitigate and, in the long term, improve the moral intuitions we must rely upon.

Moral intuitions are deeply rooted within human's cognition and social interaction, therefore unavoidable. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt studied people's response to a scenario in which a pair of siblings, brother and sister, decided to make love. Haidt reported that most of the audience immediately judged that what the two siblings did was wrong given their own reasons. After emphasizing details in the scenario that suggested a fallacy in their reasons (the danger of inbreeding, for example, defeated by the fact that the brother and sister in the scenario used two forms of birth control), many were unable to offer further defense of their judgment but nonetheless believed their judgment to be correct (Singer, 337). Thus Haidt states elsewhere that "intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second" (Haidt, 14). Haidt argues that moral intuitions serve as a cornerstone to judgment and reasoning. The nature of moral intuition therefore shows that we have no choice about their involvement in our moral judgments.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume stated, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." Hume considers passions a fundamental aspect of human psychology and motivation. They are the "original existences" that arise from our internal constitution and the interaction between our minds and externalities. This means that reason alone is not capable of motivating our moral judgements and actions. Rather, passion drives decisions and behaviors. While intuitions, rooted in passion, motivate moral action, what feels morally right or wrong can be inconsistent over time and in different situations. And due to the nature of human's ever changing emotion, this inconsistency will undermine the reliability of moral intuition as a stable influence and guide to moral judgements and decision-making. Considering Haidt's study above, the philosopher Peter Singer concluded that "it is the intuitive response that is responsible for the judgment these people reach, not the reasons they offer, for they stick to their immediate, intuitive judgment, even after they have withdrawn the reasons they initially offered for that judgment, and are unable to find better ones." This proves that humans tend to base judgments, decisions, and actions solely upon their moral intuitions.

Moral intuitions are further unreliable because of their susceptibility to emotional influence, leading to unstable judgments. We humans are emotional species, and many things come in impact of our emotions, most importantly, intuition. As intuition requires little to none rational analysis and logical thinking, it is solely based on either portrayals of what we've been educated or based on the situation and emotion of the person. In many situations, when a moral dilemma introduces factors that underscore personal belief, one tends to have a stronger and typically more negative emotional response. Indeed, psychologist Joshua D. Greene studied this phenomena by conducting MRI scans while participants respond to the second version of the Trolley problem: whether or not to throw a stranger down a footbridge to prevent the trolley from killing five other people. The report reveals a presence of greater cognitive engagement among individuals balancing personal violations against moral theories (such as "minimize harm"), while those relying solely on intuitive judgments lack this cognitive activity (Greene 2001, 17). He explained in a different work, "Because people have a robust, negative emotional response to the personal violation proposed in the footbridge case, they immediately say that it's wrong" (Greene, 178). In short, the emotional influence in moral intuitions leads to their instability, hence making moral intuitions unreliable in guiding moral judgments.

Therefore it is important to recognize common false notions within our moral intuitions as it impacts moral outcomes in humanity. Jonathan Haidt suggests a balanced approach to moral intuition by integrating it with rational deliberation. While moral intuitions are inevitable and provide an initial basis for moral decisions, Haidt advocates for using moral reasoning to complement and refine intuitions. Engaging in reasoned discourse and rational thinking helps mitigate the potential fallacies of intuitive judgments and enhances the trustworthiness of decision-making processes.

Take slavery as an example: for centuries, many cultures and regions around the world had accepted and practiced slavery and individuals within these societies often had strong moral intuitions that supported this. With these moral intuitions, people naturally viewed slavery as something justified, acceptable, and an irreplaceable factory for economic and social order. Now, we view slavery as something morally wrong, violating human rights and dignity without a doubt. The belief was reformed with the assistance of logical and rational reasoning until the current belief that slavery is morally wrong had become most people's intuitive judgment.

This example proves that moral intuition can offer important initial insight into moral dilemmas, nevertheless, they cannot offer a trustworthy and decisive guide to moral truth. Although we lack compelling reasons to blindly trust moral intuitions, acknowledging their inevitability requires balancing their role with reasoned reflection. This approach enhances moral understanding and facilitates navigating the complexities of moral dilemmas effectively.

In conclusion, although moral intuitions are often deemed unreliable due to their susceptibility to emotional influence and inconsistent reasoning, they remain unavoidable in forming initial moral judgments. We need a more nuanced exploration of moral truth. An integration of rational thinking with intuitive judgment during moral decision-making enhances our understanding of complex situations and helps us avoid over-reliance on fallible intuitions.

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