

At most, our moral judgments being determined by our emotions might show that in some sense we are not responsible for them (but cf. Korsgaard 1996a, pp. 188–212). In addition, our being driven by the *wrong* emotions might well put some kinds of moral virtue out of reach. May (pp. 230–37) never sounds more Kantian than when he closes *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind* with a discussion of moral enhancement. Korsgaard (1996a, p. 324) claims “it is not an accident that the two major philosophers in our tradition who thought of ethics in terms of practical reason – Aristotle and Kant – were also the two most concerned with the methods of moral education.” Neither of them premised their moral thought on an assumption that we were guaranteed or likely to be rational, but they also did not think it followed that when making moral judgments, we need not try to choose rationally.

In fact, Kant does not *exactly* think that we ought to try to be rational (cf. Korsgaard 2009b, pp. 153–58). He thinks we ought to try to act as a free will would, and that this comes to the same thing as trying to be rational. As I understand it, Kant’s (1996, pp. 4:440–55 or 5:28–33) basic idea here is straightforward. It begins with the claim that we only get to determine our actions if we have free will. It follows that there are no ways we can determine ourselves to act which are inconsistent with our having free will. In that sense, when trying to determine how we act, we can take it for granted that we have free will. That claim naturally extends to others when we are trying to make judgments about what they should do (cf. Korsgaard 1996a, pp. 200–12).

As I mentioned, Kant (e.g., 1996, pp. 4:451–52) draws a connection between free will and rationality. On his view, reason is fundamentally just our capacity to be genuinely active, and it has principles because there are conditions of the different ways we might be genuinely active (cf. Korsgaard 2018, pp. 132–34; 2009a, pp. 32–38). When Kant says we can take it for granted that we are able to act with free will, he is also saying we can take it for granted that we are able to be rational. It does not matter how convinced we are that we are driven by forces like our emotions. What matters is that we still face the deliberative task of trying to choose our moral judgments for ourselves. Kantians like Korsgaard argue that there is a proper way of going about that task, and they are philosophical optimists because their arguments do not appeal to our desires or emotions (cf. e.g., Street 2010, pp. 369–70; Velleman 2009, pp. 147–49).

If I am right about Korsgaard’s commitments, at least, then philosophical and empirical optimism are separate. Behind much of the debate in which May is engaging, however, is an assumption that the former requires the latter. The only way that reason can be central to morality *seems to be* if it is central to our moral psychology. That assumption comes quite naturally if we do not separate “speculative” or “theoretical” questions from “practical” ones in quite as radical a way as Kant did (cf. Allison 2004, pp. 47–49; Korsgaard 1996a, pp. 167–76, 201–205). In other words, the assumption that the two kinds of optimism go together is itself anti-Kantian. It supposes there is no deep, perspectival divide between psychology and ethics, or the tasks of trying to explain a part of the world and trying to act in it.

Of course, not everyone is a Kantian, and not every Kantian is like Korsgaard. As I mentioned earlier, the point I want to make here is one about where May’s book fits into the literature. *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind* is a challenge to pessimists about moral reason, but a challenge made on the pessimist’s terms. If it succeeds, it shows their position is undermotivated

even granting their philosophical assumptions. A Kantian like Korsgaard, however – an optimist in one sense – would not grant those assumptions to the pessimist. They would be unsettled by arguments for the claims May’s granting, but not otherwise for the claims he is challenging.

The space between rationalism and sentimentalism: A perspective from moral development

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Abstract

May interprets the prevalence of non-emotional moral intuitions as indicating support for rationalism. However, research in developmental psychology indicates that the mechanisms underlying these intuitions are not always rational in nature. Specifically, automatic intuitions can emerge passively, through processes such as evolutionary preparedness and enculturation. Although these intuitions are not always emotional, they are not clearly indicative of reason.

In *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind*, May (2018) acknowledges that moral judgments and behaviors are frequently produced by automatic intuitions. May argues that intuitive cognitive processing is best categorized as “reasoning” because it is not heavily dependent upon emotional responses. Thus, May aligns these intuitions with a rationalist (rather than sentimentalist) framework and suggests that these intuitions are not substantively threatened by debunking arguments. However, to successfully vindicate moral cognition on the grounds that it is rooted in reason, it is crucial to determine that intuitive moral cognition truly arises from inferential processes – ideally, those that move from well-justified premises to logically warranted conclusions. Otherwise, moral intuitions can more easily be dismissed, because debunking arguments rely primarily on the *irrationality* or *unreliability* of everyday moral judgments rather than on their *emotionality* (e.g., Sinnott-Armstrong 2011). Therefore, regardless of whether emotions are the primary fuel for moral judgments and actions, it is crucial to determine the extent to which these judgments and actions are aligned with reason to prevent them from being discredited.

Moral cognition, like all cognition, involves information processing. However, the complexity of this processing can vary widely. Some moral evaluations result from careful consideration of clearly represented concepts, whereas others involve no internal representations and are therefore considerably more inflexible and error-prone (e.g., Crockett 2013; Cushman 2013). Therefore, even if moral competence can be described as operating in accordance with certain principles (e.g., intentionally causing harmful outcomes is morally worse than inadvertently allowing harm to occur), this is consistent with a range of psychological

mechanisms ranging from reasoned inference to unreasoned instinct. Although the latter is not necessarily aligned with sentimentalism (as it may not be driven by emotional responding), it is also not clearly aligned with rationalism. Instead, many automatic intuitions defy this binary opposition and instead exist in a liminal space between these philosophical strongholds. A crucial empirical question is therefore raised: Are most moral intuitions produced by processes of inductive or deductive reasoning, or are they formed by less rational means?

Developmental psychology provides a crucial tool for assessing the rationality of moral intuitions, as it can uncover the sources of intuitive responding. Some cognitive developmental processes are clearly aligned with rationalism, whereas others can reveal moral intuitions to be independent of reasoning (see Shweder et al. 1981). As May (2018) proposes, intuitive automaticity could eventually result from an extended rehearsal of conscious reasoning, just like a chess expert is able to spontaneously make adept moves after internalizing the careful thinking that she exerted across many previous games (see also Pizarro & Bloom 2003; Saltzstein & Kasachkoff 2004). However, this seems unlikely, as people are often unable to consciously recover the principles that underlie their moral judgments (e.g., Cushman et al. 2006; Rottman et al. 2014), suggesting that these intuitions may have never been consciously produced to begin with. Alternatively, some developmental psychologists have argued that young children can acquire intuitive frameworks for moral reasoning as a result of rational inference (e.g., Rhodes & Wellman 2017). However, just because intuitions *can* result from rule-governed inferences does not mean that they *typically* do, and recent research on moral development has indicated that babies and children possess a wide array of adaptive moral predispositions that do not appear to be the result of rational inference (see Bloom 2013; Rottman & Young 2015). Therefore, I suspect that children's (and plausibly adults') moral competence can most accurately be described as occupying a middle ground between rationalism and sentimentalism.

From an evolutionary standpoint, it would be maladaptive to rely on one's logical reasoning abilities to reach moral conclusions, as reason would not necessarily converge upon beliefs that successfully promote social status and coordination (see Krebs 2008). Instead, it is likely that moral competence is primarily composed of innately prepared intuitions and learning mechanisms that are modulated by relevant environmental inputs during childhood (Rottman & Young 2015). Recent evidence from research with infants and young children suggests that many morally relevant intuitions are in fact the nascent products of evolutionary adaptation. These intuitions exhibit signatures of evolved psychological traits, for example, being spontaneously acquired in ways that do not rely heavily on protracted learning (see Dunham et al. 2008) and emerging so early in life that it is unlikely that they result from rational inference or relevant experiences (see Hamlin 2013). Young children also think about morality in domain-specific ways, and these features of moral cognition that transcend domain-general reasoning tendencies appear suited to resolve adaptive problems related to sociality (Cummins 1996).

Other moral intuitions rely heavily upon individual learning and enculturation, but it is similarly unlikely that this acquisition process typically involves reasoning. Rather, children are prone to blind conformity in the moral domain and are predisposed to promiscuously moralize a wide range of actions upon brief exposure to normative behaviors (see Chudek & Henrich 2011;

Rakoczy & Schmidt 2013; Tomasello 2016). A recent set of studies has indicated that learning new moral beliefs is not always a rational endeavor (Rottman et al. 2017). This research failed to support a strong sentimentalist view, as incidentally elicited disgust was insufficient for producing moralization. However, children acquired novel moral beliefs in irrational and undiscerning ways. Participants were equally persuaded by "well-fitting" and "poor-fitting" explanations, suggesting that children do not attend to the rationality of the testimony they are provided during the process of forming new moral beliefs, and they often lacked the ability to reconstruct the processes leading to their formation of moral beliefs when learning from emotion-laden testimony. Of course, this research is not conclusive by itself, particularly as it does not align with theoretical perspectives that children should only learn from testimony that they discern to be appropriate and relevant (e.g., Grusec & Goodnow 1994; Nucci 1984; also see Sobel & Kushnir 2013), and considerably more research is needed to more fully understand typical processes of moral acquisition.

Turning from moral thought to moral behavior, children sometimes appear to be motivated by virtue; they are spontaneously prosocial in certain affiliative situations when they can help others at a small cost to themselves (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello 2006). However, this prosociality is selective and strategic (see Martin & Olson 2015). In particular, when children stand to achieve a relative advantage, their behaviors are typically motivated by selfish gains. Even when they clearly understand how they *should* act in moral situations, they often choose to act in self-interested ways instead (see Blake et al. 2014). Children are strongly motivated by *appearing* moral rather than by actually *being* moral (e.g., Engelmann et al. 2013; Leimgruber et al. 2012; Shaw et al. 2014), and it takes many years for them to begin to overcome these egocentric tendencies (to the extent that they succeed at all).

On the whole, a review of recent developmental research uncovers sparse evidence that rationalism successfully accounts for moral cognition in infants and children. Instead, there is reason to conclude that moral intuitions are often *irrational*. Children's moral intuitions are constrained by innate representational biases that are diversified through sociocultural learning, rather than actively formed through reasoned inferences about social interactions. Of course, biased intuitions that are similarly irrational, motivated, and inaccessible to introspection have also been argued to characterize much of adult moral cognition (e.g., Greene 2013; Haidt 2001), but May (2018) argues that the evidence for these biases either falls short or is limited in scope. Developmental evidence has the potential to bolster the pessimists' claims even further, however. First, studying development can rule out some alternative interpretations of automaticity (e.g., that it results from initial judicious deliberation). The processes leading to moral belief formation may be more generally defective than is evident from studies of adult moral cognition, thus surmounting the "Debunker's Dilemma." Second, early development may be a time when motivations are particularly egocentric and situational, and thus poor motivations are sometimes sufficiently pervasive for surmounting the "Defeater's Dilemma."

Overall, although I disagree with many of May's (2018) conclusions, I applaud the many redeeming qualities of this impressive treatise. Throughout its thorough consideration of a wide swath of evidence, this book provides an important counterweight to oppose the strong force of the sometimes overblown claims that morality is wholly driven by emotions and egoism rather than by

reason and virtue. The sentimentalism that has largely taken hold in social psychological approaches to moral psychology (e.g., Haidt 2001) has sometimes obscured the cases in which reason can play at least a limited role in moral cognition (e.g., Holyoak & Powell 2016; Paxton & Greene 2010; Pizarro & Bloom 2003). This emphasis on rapid emotional responding is reflective of a more general tendency to focus on the irrational, motivated, and biased nature of human thought that has prevailed in the field of social psychology as a whole (see Alter 2013; Bargh 2017; Nisbett & Wilson 1977). On the contrary, many developmental psychologists have sought and often found evidence for the rational, scientific, and objective nature of children's thought (see Gopnik 2012; Schulz 2012; Xu & Kushnir 2013). In recent years, dozens of elegant studies have demonstrated that children can use scientist-like reasoning to form and revise beliefs (e.g., Schulz et al. 2007; Sobel & Kirkham 2006), indicating that children rely heavily on reason in certain contexts. This characterization has also reigned in classical theories of moral development, which posit that moral judgments are produced by careful reflection (e.g., Kohlberg 1971; Nucci & Turiel 1978; Piaget 1932; Smetana 2006). However, just as adults are not as asinine as social psychologists often characterize them, children are not as astute as developmental psychologists often characterize them. This may be especially true in the moral domain, for which affiliative motivations tend to reign over truth-seeking and it is difficult (if not impossible) to construct knowledge through individually acting on the world.

Descriptively, there are myriad possibilities for characterizing the nature of moral cognition. As reviewed here, research in moral development has indicated that emotional forces do not ubiquitously drive moral evaluations and behaviors, but neither does careful inductive reasoning. There is an intermediate space between sentimentalism and rationalism that may most accurately characterize everyday moral psychology. Therefore, regardless of whether emotions are shown to be unnecessary or insufficient for moral development to occur, despite some arguments to the contrary (e.g., Eisenberg 2000; Hoffman 1975; Kagan 1987), the veracity of rationalism would not necessarily hinge upon the success of these demonstrations. Even if sentimentalism is found to be empirically false, the unreasoned and heuristic nature of many moral intuitions prompts a cautious pessimism regarding the nature of moral cognition. While this stance is certainly less pleasant than optimism, it may be beneficial for avoiding complacency. A healthy dose of pessimism can serve as motivation for fostering a more humane world, perhaps by investigating ways to encourage future generations to overcome natural moral inclinations. By resisting the tendency to consider moral "truths" to be self-evident and by vigilantly entreating children to apply careful reasoning to crucial moral issues, it may be possible to nurture moral cognition in the direction of rationalism.

Humean replies to *Regard for Reason*

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Abstract

First, I argue that the Humean theory is compatible with the commonsense psychological explanations May invokes against it. Second, I explain why desire provides better-integrated explanations than the mental states May describes as sharing its effects. Third, I defend individuating processes by relata, which May rejects in arguing that anti-Humean views are as parsimonious as the Humean theory.

May's (2018) *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind* is a novel and important defense of the view that reason guides moral thought and motivation in human beings. Although rationalist views of moral psychology have many defenders, few engage in as much detail as May with empirical arguments from situationists, egoists, and Humeans. If rationalists avoid these challenges, they face the criticism that although their theories describe a possible moral psychology, it is not the one that human beings have. May is not afraid to get his hands dirty with the empirical data, and much of his book responds in detail to his opponents' empirical arguments.

Although I doubt situationism and reject egoism, I defend the Humean theory of motivation. May and I agree on how the Humean theory should be formulated: It includes commitments both to the necessity of desire for motivation, and to the impossibility of generating new desires by reasoning from beliefs alone. Desire, then, is not merely an immediate motivator of action that reason can summon up on command. It is the fundamental source of all motivation, and new motivation cannot be generated without it.

Formulated this strongly, the Humean theory is incompatible with the view that moral judgments are beliefs with intrinsic motivational (or desire-generating) force. Creatures with Humean psychologies cannot make moral judgments that fit this cognitivist and internalist model. May regards moral judgments as beliefs that can generate desires this way, and therefore must reject the Humean theory.

In *Humean Nature* (Sinhababu 2017), I argue that the Humean theory is part of the best explanation of how we think, feel, and act. Desire does not just motivate action. It causes pleasant and unpleasant feelings when we have various sorts of thoughts about its object, and it directs our attention toward its object in various ways. Because of its emotional and attentional effects, desire is well-suited to explaining the thoughts and feelings that arise in practical deliberation and various other phenomena like procrastination and daydreaming.

May responds to my arguments at length after describing me as "the best 'philosophical nemesis' one could ask for" (p. xii) in the preface. Here I will try to live up to his praise by defending the Humean theory against three different lines of argument he makes against it.

First, May argues that the Humean theory runs against commonsense explanations of human motivation that we often rely on. He cites examples of people who describe their own moral motivation as the result of a belief that something is the right thing to do. Then he argues that "We often describe one another, and ourselves, this way – as ultimately motivated by beliefs with normative or evaluative content" (p. 180). On May's view, the content of such beliefs enables them to generate new desires to act accordingly, violating the Humean theory. I agree with May that it would be a problem for the Humean theory if our intuitive