Study questions for Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (MIT, 2006).

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INTRODUCTION

What are the "two tasks of the book"?

1. Answer the question: "is human morality innate?"

2. Answer the question: "so what"? (in terms of moral realism, that is, are there objective moral facts to which our moral judgments refer?)

How does RJ define "innate"?

Can the trait in question (morality) "be given an adaptive explanation in genetic terms"? That is, "did it help our ancestors make babies"? Note that innateness does not equal inevitable. It still needs proper environmental input. (This is badly posed in DST terms, but we'll let that go. Briefly, he needs to fold cultural evolution into the question of "evolution" and not try to separate "the biological." But then he's got to talk about group selection for sets of cultural practices, and hence he can't stay with his unconscious [biological AND political / moral, i.e., liberal] individualism.)

How does he define "morality"?

Not as behaving in morally laudable ways, but as making moral judgments in the course of everyday life. We are predisposed to make moral judgments about certain categories of events, though the "content is determined by contingent environmental and cultural factors."

What is the difference btw sociobiology and evolutionary psychology (EP)?

Sociobiology focuses on behavior, EP on psych mechanisms producing that behavior. Thus EP can say we have modules that once were adaptive, but are no longer in modern life.

What is controversial about EP?

Massive modularity thesis; though they do allow for general purpose flexibility. The question is the ratio of inherited modules vs all-purpose flexibility. It's safe to claim basic emotions are innate and have some pre-set eliciting factors.

How does Joyce handle the the question of genetic determinism that is raised in the sociobiology / EP debates?

> We are coded for having "a" morality, while culture provides the content.

What does Joyce have to say about the politics of science vis-à-vis the early sociobiology debates?

> I find Joyce at best irritatingly naïve here. As if we can shield the EP crowd from the facile misunderstandings political conservatives make of EP claims, using "science" and "human nature" as bludgeons to justify current inequalities. Either he doesn't know about these uses, in which case he is culpably ignorant, or he does and is cynical enough to want to write his book as an "intellectual" and wash his hands of "politics."

CHAPTER 1: THE NATURAL SELECTION OF HELPING

1.1 *Altruism and Selfishness*

What are the distinctions btw helping, fitness-sacrificing, and altruism?

1. Helping is just beneficial behavior. No psychological component needed.

2. Fitness-sacrificing is helping that hurts your fitness to advance another's fitness. Also needs no psychology.

3. Altruism is defined in psychological terms: acting w/ intention of helping another, motivated by non-instrumental concern (i.e., w/ no expectation of payback). Denied by psychological egoists.

Why must we distinguish between interests and reproductive fitness?

> Otherwise you get into a mess with confusing levels of explanation (answer doesn't come until p. 17-18). Psychological motivation should not be confused with ultimate genetic explanations. E.g., that "love" is an adaptation of our ancestors to help fitness (needed for pair bonding and for raising children) doesn't mean your personal love is a trick of your selfish genes. Genes can't be selfish bcs they don't have interests.

> The big issue here is whether fitness-sacrificing behavior can be selected for. That is, at base, is morality "anti-natural"? (cf. De Waal).

How do altruism and morality relate to helping behavior?

> They are possibly both evolved mechanism for producing helping behavior.

Why does Joyce discuss kin selection, mutualism, reciprocity, and group selection?

> They are possible means by which propensities toward helping behavior evolved.

Where does culture fit in?

> It too might have helped in producing helping behavior. (We'll see more examples of Joyce's naïveté in that discussion.)

1.2 *Kin Selection*

What is the Dawkins vehicle vs replicator distinction?

> Genes are replicators; organisms are vehicles (of the replicators).

What does kin selection explain?

> Fitness sacrificing behavior in favor of kin.

How might it explain helping non-kin?

1. There might be coarse psych mechanism for recognizing kin, e.g., anyone you're in close contact with from childhood, or even more broadly, anyone you're around a lot in everyday life.

2. NS might have extended kin-helping mechanisms beyond their original use, analogously to how oxytocin pair-bonding is extended beyond mother-child.

1.3 *Mutualism*

What is the difference between mutualism and reciprocity?

> There's not necessarily an ongoing relation in mutual aid. Remind students of Kropotkin and *Mutual Aid* book at this time.

1.4 *Direct reciprocity*

What did Trivers call "reciprocal altruism"?

Why is this a confusing term, according to Joyce's understanding of "altruism"?

Why does direct reciprocity not involve fitness-sacrificing?

What is the prisoner's dilemma? What changes with an iterated game?

1.5 *Indirect reciprocity*

What is indirect reciprocity?

    When your payback comes from someone other than the one you helped.

What is the key to understanding indirect reciprocity?

    Reputation.

What is sexual selection and how does it factor into indirect reciprocity?

    It is a process whereby choosiness of mates or competition among rivals can produce traits that would otherwise be fitness-disadvantageous (e.g., peacock tail). So helping behavior might be selected for if a reputation for prosocial behavior would be attractive to prospective mates.

How does punishment fit in here?

    It is the inverse of reward. Thus traits can be selected against.

    This is extremely important considering the experiment in neo-liberal individualism. Are we setting up a social system that selects against helping behavior? Perhaps what we see is the robustness of prosociality if it continues to manifest itself despite all the neo-liberal experimentation?

    It's important to stress not just the non-naturalness of neo-liberalism, despite its [false] implicit or explicit claims that its individualism reflects "human nature" [our "innate / God-given desire to be free" or what have you], but also its sheer radicality, the huge departure it represents from most cultural practices. A little Burkean conservatism [that sees history as social system experimentation, so that wide-spread practices are seen as successful, as having passed the selection pressure of historical competition] might be helpful here.

1.6 *Group selection*

What is the target of selection pressure in group selection?

    The set of social practices producing a certain trait, which I take to lay behind the following statment "groups containing helpers will outperform groups containing fewer or no helpers" (37). Cf. 42: "selective pressure in favor of the persistence and proliferation of cultural traits that are broadly 'prosocial.'"

What is Joyce's position regarding fitness-sacrificing in group selection?

    He's agnostic about it, *since his project is only about prosocial (helping) behavior*.

What happens if you add reciprocity to the mix?

The helping behaviors are selected for all the more, since the helpful are now helped.

1.7 *Evolution of Human Ultra-Sociality*

Basically, this is Joyce's discussion of the relation of biological and cultural evolution. Again, from a DST perspective, this is a slightly ill-formed way of asking the question, as the developmental system producing a life cycle includes reliably reproduced cultural practices.

What does Joyce propose as a mechanism for cultural learning?

Imitation. We recall from Haidt that this can be embodiment of motor schemas, embodied metaphors, etc.

Why is it important to consider punishment?

It can decrease within-group variation while enhancing intergroup variation.

Yes, but this is very naïve. It overlooks the widespread presence of intragroup stratification. So the target of selection is the set of socializing practices producing social structure, which may be egalitarian or may be hierarchical. In the latter case, your prosocial behaviors are not indiscriminate, but codified.

What about relation of genes and culture?

Culture is niche-formation, so there are pressures on genes from cultural practices. The famous examples are lactose tolerance and sickle-cell.

But we should also acknowledge Dunbar's social brain hypothesis, the Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis (does this extend down to brain size and structure like Dunbar?), and Deacon's "symbolic species" argument (co-evolution of language and brain, with emphasis on linguistic structure).

CHAPTER 2: THE NATURE OF MORALITY

What is at stake in the discussion of pure non-cognitivism?

The question is whether or not we assert a belief along with expressing an emotion in making moral judgments. The cognitive aspect of asserting a belief is important for Joyce regarding moral realism. We have false beliefs, he will say, when make a moral judgment

as if it were about an objective feature of the world, but at least we have beliefs. If morality were just expressing emotions, we wouldn't be in the ballpark of moral realism. In other words, you can't have a false belief if you don't have beliefs at all.

What is the relation of moral judgments and hypothetical imperatives?

Moral judgments are not hypotheticals, that is, they don't make reference to the interests or ends of the person to whom they are addressed.

Can you get out of a moral judgment by just saying it doesn't interest me?

No, they are supposed to be universal or inescapable.

Are moral judgments just expressions of the conventions of a group?

No. In fact, there is a widespread and early appearing distinction between moral judgments and conventional rules.

What is the target area of moral judgments?

Social relations.

What are the candidates for universals in moral systems?

1. Negative appraisal of harming others. (W/o justification. In group vs out group important here too).

2. Regulation of reciprocity and fairness. (Again, there's lots of nuance here regarding appropriate gift-giving, etc.)

3. Regulation of status in social hierarchy. (Only one of the reasons why Joyce's naïveté about politics is maddening: why does this huge inflection of "prosociality" pass w/o comment?)

4. Regulation of body conduct – cleanliness, sexual activity, etc.

How do desert and justice factor in?

They are necessary for moral judgments in so far as reward and punishment are at stake.

How does guilt factor in?

It seems to be an important mechanism for regulating moral conduct.

Nietzsche has a lot to say about the cultural evolution (and by extension, the political uses) of guilt. But Joyce neglects Nietzsche. I suspect for two reasons: one, he's insecure about the propriety of mentioning N in a "serious" analytic philosophy book about morals (N isn't on the approved citation list); and two, he'd have to take cultural evolution more seriously than he does. Which is where DST and neural plasticity would combine for a one-two punch: reliable cultural factors are part of the developmental system that is the unit of evolution, and experience changes our brains.

CHAPTER 3: MORAL LANGUAGE AND MORAL EMOTIONS

3.1 *Normative (but Non-Moral) Mental Life of Animals*

What is key claim of chapter 3?

> That animals don't make moral judgments bcs possession of moral concepts relies upon language.

What is de Waal's distinction btw descriptive and prescriptive social rules?

> Descriptive are just "regularities" of behavior. Prescriptive are regularities that are "respected bcs of active reinforcement of others" (77).

Joyce grants certain beliefs to animals, but not others. Which ones?

> They can have beliefs about what "should" happen in sense of prediction, but not what "ought" to happen in moral sense.

3.2 *No Moral Judgments for Chimps*

To what does Joyce want to limit chimps?

> Aversions, inhibitions, and desires. No thoughts about transgressions or prohibitions or deserved punishments or other moral concepts (80).

What are the candidates that in the eyes of others keep animals from morality?

> 1. Moral concepts are too abstract.
>
> 2. Moral concepts are too complex.
>
> 3. Animals lack self-awareness.
>
> 4. Animals cannot judge whether their standards of judgment are justified.

Joyce accepts 3 and 4 as plausible.

What is Joyce's explanation?

That moral concepts involve "semantic ascent," that is, understanding the linguistic character of some concepts (i.e., that they are terms of approval or disapproval relative to a community of language users).

3.3 *Realism versus Instrumentalism about Moral Beliefs*

What is the difference between realism and instrumentalism about the possession of beliefs? (NB, not to be confused with question of realism of content of belief, i.e., whether the content of the belief exists independently of the belief.)

Realists claim there is a causal chain producing the behavior that is to be explained by the possession of a belief. Instrumentalists claim that it is only useful to posit such a belief as an explanation of behavior.

Where does Joyce come down in this debate?

He's an instrumentalist when it comes to animal moral beliefs. I.e., he denies there is a brain state equivalent to (that accounts for) the (alleged) moral belief of animals.

3.4 *A Language of Reciprocity*

What are the key observations behind Dunbar's thesis of the evolution of language?

1. Primate social cohesion via grooming. Max social budget of 20%

2. Correlation of neocortex ratio and group size. (Neocortex processes social info.)

What is the thesis then?

Intergroup conflict provides selection pressures for efficient social bonding w/in larger social groups.

What is role of gossip?

Social info: behaviors can be rewarded or punished on the basis of reputation, not just observation. (3rd party norm enforcement).

How does trade factor in?

Gossip and reputation reward / punishment allows for growth of trade.

But see Nietzsche / DG thesis on debt as prior to exchange.

3.5 *Taking Stock of the Strategy*

How does emotion factor in?

Some moral emotions are "cognitively rich" and require evaluative concepts. Thus "language is necessary for certain emotions and evolution of language made certain moral emotions accessible" (94).

3.6 *Emotions*

What are the basic emotions? Why did they evolve?

Adaptive modules.

How does culture factor in?

Elaboration of basic emotional suite.

How does Joyce argue that some emotions "involve a degree of cognitive sophistication"?

Example of distaste vs disgust (involves offensiveness and contamination: "sympathetic magical thinking"). Guilt arises late in infant's repertoire.

Why does Joyce not want to claim that beliefs are necessary for emotions?

Our emotional reaction to fiction would be inexplicable. But note that intentional state (content of mental state) can provide object of an emotion, but it's the brain state that causes the emotion (brain / body state for Damasio).

What is the importance of fiction to Joyce's argument?

That emotional triggers are too crude to distinguish reality and fiction. (this will allow for Joyce's "projection of emotions" explanation of false beliefs relative to objective content of moral beliefs.)

3.7 *Guilt*

What is guilt? How doe it relate to "conscience"?

Self-directed emotion regulating moral conduct from within.

How does guilt relate to shame?

Guilt is about transgressions; shame about shortcomings (102).

I think Joyce underplays the cultural variation here (see the Haidt article on moral emotions), because he underplays cultural evolution. E.g, "humans have an innate capacity to judge certain actions to be transgressions of endorsed normative frameworks, meriting reparative or punitive response" (104). Again, a DST perspective would help here by defining "innate" as "reliably produced given certain social inputs." It's the social inputs that vary and that impact guilt versus shame. Again, it's too bad he didn't tackle Nietzsche on cultural evolution of guilt.

CHAPTER 4: THE MORAL SENSE

4.1 *Introduction*

What is the difference btw a trait being an adaptation and a trait being adaptive? Why is this an important distinction to make regarding morality?

> An adaptation is a current trait that was adaptive to our ancestors, that is, it helped their fitness. An adaptation need not currently be adaptive, that is, it need not currently help our fitness (although it might). This is important concerning morality, because it might no longer be adaptive (though it might be "useful" in some vernacular sense).

What question will Joyce focus upon?

> Whether self-directed moral judgment – about prosocial behavior – (i.e., having a "conscience") is or was adaptive.

4.2 *Conscience as a Personal Commitment*

What does he think a moral sense does for us?

> It provides motivation and hence "probabilifies" action. (This is an extremely ugly word; what is wrong with saying "it increases the probability of an action"?)

How does he discuss weakness of the will?

> Prudential calculation isn't always sufficient motivation. This is the price we have to apy for flexibility in decision-making in changing circumstances.

What about prosocial behavior (co-operation)? How does moral conscience intervene?

> This is so important it might require a special motivational mechanism: moral conscience, so that the action must be performed no matter the circumstances. Thus moral imperatives are "conversation-stoppers": they end deliberation. And they enable /

motivate punishment, both of self and others. Thus it increases likelihood of performing prosocial actions.

Why would NS bother with such a mechanism? Why not govern it by emotion (as with child protection)?

Well, human prosociality is unique due to its complexity.

What about emotion and moral judgment?

Here (116 ff) Joyce appeals to Haidt's "social intuitionist" model. Thus the judgment can be "embedded" in the emotion. (Remember Joyce's support of cognitive content of emotion.) So the post-hoc rationalization can bolster motivation, bcs now you have made a public commitment of your position. Joyce recalls the "distributed" nature of moral judgments, that is, it occurs between people and over time. (In cog sci terms, moral judgment is embodied and [socially] embedded.)

What is important about Joyce's claim that we may be set up to "moralize the whole plastic social structure"? (118)

This is the opening to politics. Consider his discussion of "flexible" co-operation based on available resources. This is neo-liberalism's wedge: threaten people's existence and hence create conditions to break solidarity and produce individualism. The horrible irony comes when they claim that such hugely artificial individualism is "human nature."

4.3 *Conscience as Interpersonal Commitment*

What are the interpersonal elements of having a conscience?

The short answer is that having a reputation of sticking up for yourself will keep others from trying to take advantage of you. That is, it alters their options.

The important thing is to see morality not as private decision-making, but as public interaction, embedded in long-term social processes of reputation making / preserving, etc.

4.4 *The Projection of Emotions*

How might NS have come up with moral conscience?

Following Damasio, it was by modifying the neurological basis for reason / emotion interface. (Although, again, I'd be happier if Joyce would talk in terms of "evolution" than NS, since the latter leads many people to separate biological and cultural evolution and see the latter as an add-on, rather than there from the start.)

What is "moral projectivism"?

> Projection of moral properties onto the world, analogous to supposed projection of secondary sensory qualities (e.g., color). There are huge presuppositions here about idea that we "project" human qualities onto a brute material world: for one thing, it presupposes a "subjective" vs "objective" split that is challenged by many. For instance, the "enactive" school (Alva Noë) would say we enact perception via practical knowledge / body skill of mastery of regular variation of sensation and movement capacities. Ezequiel Di Paolo and Hanne de Jaegher are trying to work out an enactive view of social life ("social interactionism"). There's too much to discuss here, but suffice it to say that "projectivism" is not nearly as non-controversial as Joyce presents it.

How does it fit with question of moral realism?

> Capacity for moral judgments and moral emotions evolve bcs of pressures for "practical success" not for "accuracy" (127) in relating content of belief with objective reality. All that counts is that subjects feel that their judgments capture an aspect of reality, so that in making the judgment they are asserting a belief, not just expressing an emotion. Thus "moral objectivism is the default setting on common-sense metaethics" (129). So, returning to Haidt, even if our emotionally produced intuitions drive our judgments, we are caught by the wag the dog illusion that it's our reason that's at work, and that our reason captures objective reality (130). And that illusion was practically successful in producing / motivating prosocial behavior in our ancestors (131).

> Again, moral realism discourse rests on correspondence theory of truth and that rests on subject – object metaphysics.

4.5 *A Big Fat Just-So Story?*

What is the threat to Joyce's story, so that he writes this section?

> He has to make sure his story is a testable hypothesis rather than just a story.

What evidence does he appeal to?

> 1. Anthropology: universality of morality implies innateness.
>
> 2. Developmental psychology: robust appearance of moral judgment capacities points to innateness.

What is relation of culture and innateness for Joyce?

> Culture provides variable content; but culture is so variable it can't account for regularity of moral development (137).

OK, I'll buy that, but I'm not sure he can include guilt in his universals. Or at least he needs to account for the specific quality and intensity of Western guilt as analyzed by Nietzsche.

What is argument against internalization?

He doesn't see how a general purpose learning mechanism (as opposed to a moral judgment module) can lead to internalization of norms (137).

What is the argument against cultural origin of morality in human pre-history?

Moral judgment is a holistic process. It doesn't seem likely it can be taught piecemeal or inferred from observation (138-39). It requires a brain shaped by NS for prosocial behaviors.

4.6 *Conclusion*

How does Joyce see the relation of reciprocity vs group selection?

He thinks the widespread presence of valuing reciprocity in moral systems was first factor, though group selection and cultural evolution are also a major factor. He emphasizes there is no single gene for morality or any one brain region. (Morality is an "emergent" process, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically.)

What about the relation of reciprocity and morality?

First of all, reciprocity is like oxytocin: it is the evolutionary basis for broadening prosocial behaviors, all the way up to fitness-sacrificing altruism, let's say, and not the last word of its possible function (141). Also, we have to distinguish proximate psychological motivations, which we judge when we judge whether an act is moral or not, and ultimate genetic explanations, i.e., how the psychological mechanisms (feeling for reciprocity) producing prosocial behaviors evolved (142).