

PSYC3016: Developmental Psychology

Moral development 2

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Reading – MD2

Recommended reading (not required)

- Young children use motive information to make trait inferences. Heyman & Gelman, Dev Psychol. 34(2):310-21
- Children's Understanding of Moral Emotions. Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, Child Development, 1988

Learning Outcomes

- LO1 – understand the violence inhibition mechanism and how it can fit into a sentimentalist view of moral development
- LO2 – understand the developmental trajectory of the balance between outcomes and intentions when forming a moral judgement
- LO4 – consider how the balance between outcomes and intentions is relevant when thinking about current trends in moral judgement and social behaviour
- LO2 – consider how experimental design has enabled us to learn about the developmental of moral judgements with respect to outcomes and intentions
- LO3 – explain how different moral development tasks inform us of the different aspects of children's moral development and behaviour

A developmental model from psychopathy

R. J. R. Blair

A cognitive developmental approach to morality: Investigating the psychopath. *Cognition*, 57, 1-29

“Psychopaths are impaired in their ability to form associations between their behaviour and socially-relevant cues (aversive unconditioned stimuli)”

In other words, violence and aggression are overcome by processes of sympathy and empathy in non-psychopaths

Central to Blair’s original hypothesis is the *Violence Inhibition Mechanism* (VIM)

“[Blair] considered the VIM to be a cognitive mechanism which, when activated by non-verbal communications of distress (i.e., sad facial expression, the sight and sound of tears), initiates a withdraw response; a schema will be activated predisposing the individual to withdraw from the attack. Consistent with this suggestion, Camras (1977) has observed that the display of distress cues (a sad facial expression) does result in the termination of aggression in 4- to 7-year-olds”

(p. 3)

A developmental model from Psychopathy

R. J. R. Blair

Deafness to fear in boys with psychopathic tendencies.

Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 46(3) 2005

This study presents data on young adolescents with 'psychopathic tendencies'. The findings are relatively simple – adolescents with psychopathic tendencies make more errors than comparison children in their recognition of **audio recordings of fear vocalizations**. (There were no significant differences for the other emotions.)

Table 1 Participant characteristics and mean vocal emotion recognition errors for boys with psychopathic tendencies and comparison individuals

	Psychopathic tendencies group (<i>N</i> = 22)			Comparison group (<i>N</i> = 21)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Participant characteristics						
APSD	30.52**	3.07	25 to 37	6.48	4.68	0 to 15
C/U	7.28**	1.41	5.5 to 10	2.43	2.10	0 to 6
Impulsivity	8.83**	1.87	6 to 15	2.57	2.49	0 to 8
Narcissistic	11.15**	2.33	4.5 to 14	1.52	1.63	0 to 6.5
Age	13.15	.91	12.3 to 15.5	12.87	.82	11.8 to 15.2
IQ	87.82*	8.51	73 to 108	94.52	12.46	79 to 126
Vocal affect recognition errors (maximum = 12)						
Happiness	3.73	3.17	0 to 11	1.75	1.92	0 to 7
Disgust	4.00	3.88	0 to 11	3.50	2.91	0 to 10
Anger	2.18	1.82	0 to 8	2.25	1.56	0 to 5
Sadness	2.05	1.53	0 to 6	2.50	2.82	0 to 9
Fear	4.73*	3.84	0 to 12	2.20	1.96	0 to 7

Key to Table 1: APSD = Antisocial Process Screening Device; C/U = the Callous and Unemotional component of psychopathy (e.g., a lack of guilt); I/CP = the impulsive and conduct problems component of psychopathy (e.g., engaging in crime); IQ = intelligence quotient (from BPVS); *N* = number of participants.

p* < .05. *p* < .001.

A developmental model from Psychopathy

R. J. R. Blair

Moral reasoning and conduct problems in children with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Personality and Individual Differences, 31, 799-811

In keeping with Blair's hypothesis, this paper asks whether performance on the moral/conventional distinction predicts levels of childhood conduct problems

Sample

- 102 Male resident children a Special Schools for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties
- “too problematic for education in mainstream”
- Children screened with Psychopathy Screening Device (PSD)
high=27; medium=63; low=21

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While the subjects did not judge the conventional transgressions to be any more permissible than the moral transgressions, they did judge them to be less serious, more under the jurisdiction of authority and more rule contingent

The high PSD group made significantly less of a moral/conventional distinction than the low PSD group for Welfare authority and Rule contingency

So, looking at Seriousness, for example, the distinction (i.e., difference) between M and C was smaller for High PSD (7.86 – 6.63) than Low PSD (8.58 – 6.74)

Table 1

The means and standard deviations of the criterion judgements for both subject groups and for both transgressions and positive acts

Group ^a	Biographical details		Criterion judgements									
	Age	Verbal ability	Permissibility		Seriousness		Welfare authority			Rule contingency		
			M	C	M	* C	M	* C	M	C	M	* C
High PSD scorers	12.22 (2.50)	82.33 (13.31)	0.92 (0.21)	0.92 (0.19)	7.86 (2.10)	6.63 (1.88)	0.26 (0.37)	0.01 (0.06)	0.57 (0.43)	0.36 (0.37)	0.64 (0.40)	0.54 (0.35)
Low PSD scorers	12.88 (2.05)	76.62 (10.57)	0.94 (0.19)	0.90 (0.19)	8.58 (1.49)	6.74 (2.06)	0.46 (0.30)	0.00 (0.00)	0.77 (0.33)	0.43 (0.36)	0.82 (0.28)	0.43 (0.35)

^a PSD, Psychopathy Screening Device.

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What if we turn the question round? Does M/C distinction group predict psychopathic traits?

Table 3

Moral/conventional distinction group and rated levels of behavioural disturbance as indicated by the Psychopathy Screening Device (PSD)^a

	Failers	Passers	<i>F</i> (1, 59)	<i>P</i>
<i>Biographical data</i>				
Age	12.83 (2.01)	12.54 (2.09)	0.299	n.s.
Verbal ability	81.70 (14.58)	83.29 (11.22)	0.229	n.s.
Total behavioural performance				
<i>Total behavioural performance</i>				
PSD	21.95 (7.01)	18.39 (5.64)	4.799	< 0.05
Motivational	5.70 (2.31)	4.34 (1.97)	6.140	< 0.05
Impulsivity	11.18 (3.76)	9.42 (3.30)	3.794	< 0.05
Other	4.95 (1.77)	4.37 (1.50)	1.907	< 0.1

^a 'Failers', those who scored 0 or less on the moral/conventional distinction measure under modified rule conditions (see Section 2.5); 'Passes', those who scored 4 or greater on the moral/conventional distinction measure under modified rule conditions; PSD, score on PSD; Motivational, score on the interpersonal and motivational factor of the PSD; Impulsivity, score on the impulsivity and conduct disorder factor of the PSD; Other, score on the four items not included in the interpersonal and motivational factor or the Impulsivity and Conduct Disorder factor.

A developmental model from Psychopathy

R. J. R. Blair

The VIM, however it is constituted, is the reason for psychopathy

“Psychopathy is associated with the inability to feel empathy with the victim (Hare, 1985a)... not only does VIM interrupt violent action on line (in the context of distress cues) but it also developmentally inhibits violent action. The child with VIM will be ... negatively reinforced following any action that results in the display of distress cues by a victim. The child without VIM would not be negatively reinforced; he would, therefore, be much more likely to show violent tendencies from a very early age. Psychopaths are associated with considerable violent tendencies from a very early age ...” (pp. 10-11)

Update: what James Blair says now...

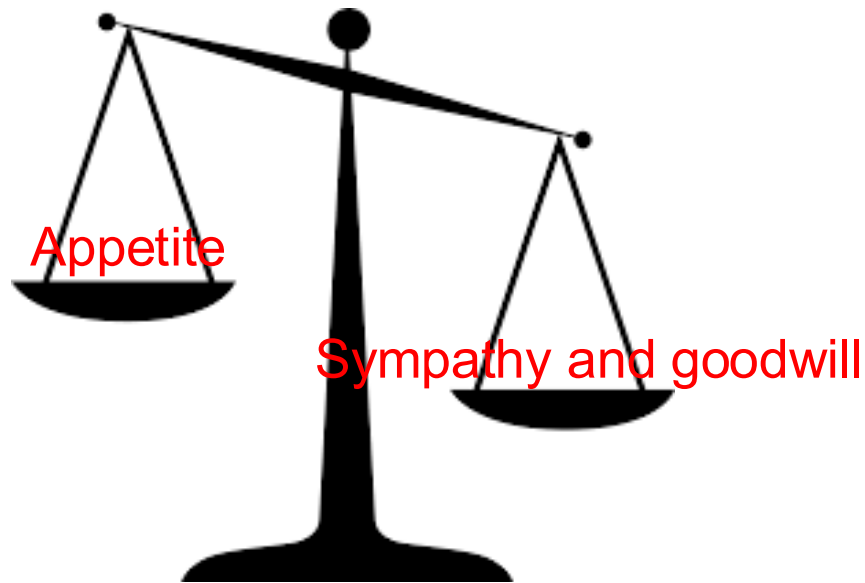
The sentimentalist tradition

- Blair's research is a kind of extreme form of what is known as the *sentimentalist tradition* in moral philosophy (Hume)
- Another sentimentalist was Darwin, who proposed something not too different to Blair (see extra slides at end of lecture)
- Darwin thought that we are driven by different sorts of *instincts*:
 - **Social** (affiliative), impulses which are constant and moderate
 - **Appetites**, which are sudden and strong (e.g. aggression, sex drive)

The sentimentalist tradition

Darwin says:

Thus, as man cannot prevent old impressions continually passing through his mind, he will be compelled to compare the weaker impressions of, for instance, past hunger, or of vengeance satisfied or danger avoided at the cost of other men, with the instinct of sympathy and good-will to his fellows, which is still present and ever in some degree active in his mind. He will then feel in his imagination that a stronger instinct has yielded to one which now seems comparatively weak; and then that sense of dissatisfaction will inevitably be felt with which man is endowed ... in order that his instincts may be obeyed" (Decent of Man, p. 90)



According to Darwin this “dissatisfaction” is regret or remorse, and its painful character ultimately teaches us to control our appetites when they conflict with our social instincts (Korsgaard, p.12)

Children's moral understanding

- In sentimentalist theories, children are moral because they are empathic (or something like that), so one challenge is to figure out HOW empathic they are!
- But even those child researchers with a sentimentalist orientation (e.g., Eisenberg, Smetana) realize what Aristotle articulated long ago: just because we feel *pity* does not imply that **we will act on that feeling**
- Behaviour is how we *communicate* what we feel

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- But even those child researchers with a sentimentalist orientation (e.g., Eisenberg, Smetana) realize what Aristotle articulated long ago: just because we feel *pity* does not imply that we will act on that feeling
- those interested in children's moral reasoning or thinking have more recently focused on children's abilities to identify and evaluate simple *reasons* for people's actions: that is, children's capacity to identify the *intentions motivating people's actions*
- This 'capacity' implies Theory of Mind (in the broad sense), because **it is people's motives and intentions that are the main objects of moral approval or disapproval**

Children's moral understanding

- So let's go back to Kohlberg!
- Kohlberg characterized the young child's morality as one of constraint: they justify acts as good/bad, right/wrong in terms of *consequences* (pre-conventional) or in terms of social norms and *conventions* (moral realism/conventional)

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Chris: Breaks 1 cup
doing something naughty

Who is naughtier?



Billy: Breaks 15
cups accidentally

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Under 7 years, Billy is judged to be naughtier and more deserving of punishment than Chris



Chris: Breaks 1 cup
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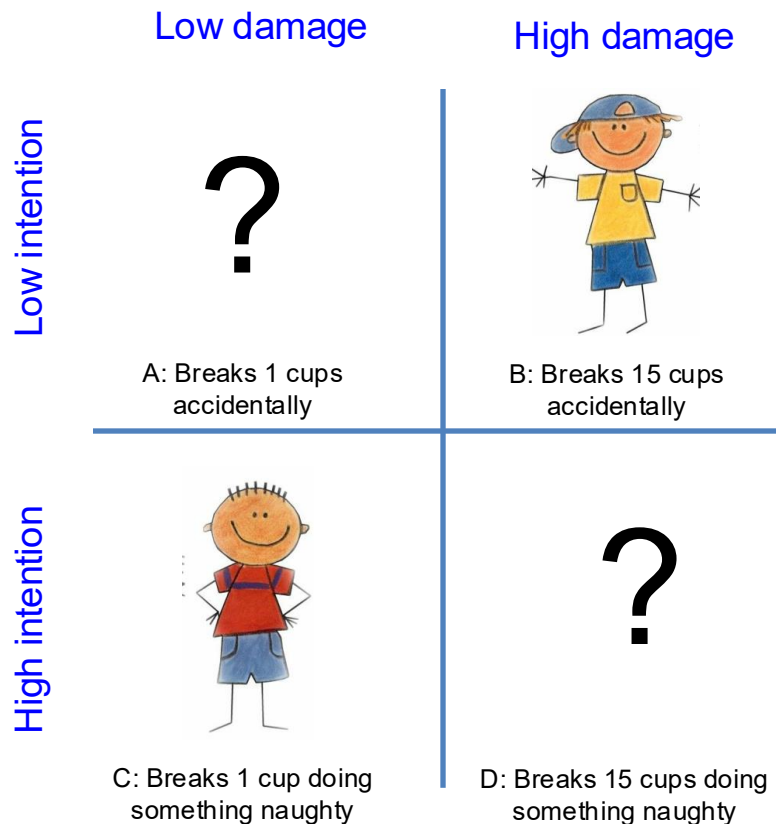


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Children's moral understanding

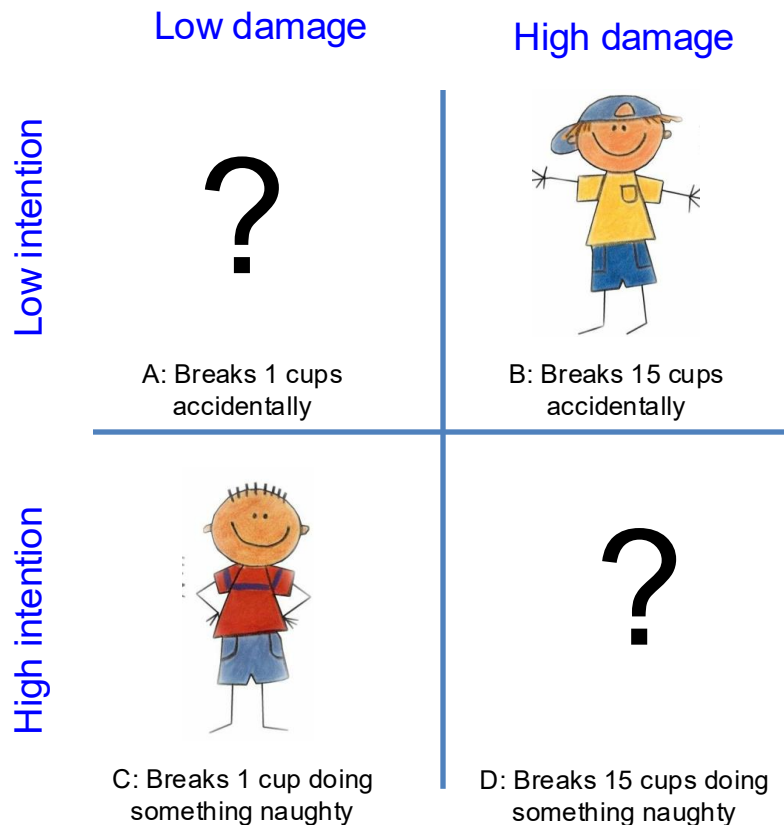
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But wait, this experiment
isn't well balanced



Children's moral understanding

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It turns out that young children privilege outcome, but they are not blind to intention

They judge B worse than C – true

But they also judge
C worse than A
D worse than B

So they are using both sorts of information (see Hayman & Gelman)

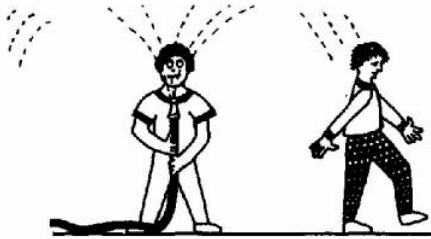
Children's moral understanding

Intentions and motives

- Young children DO in fact balance motive – but they DO privilege outcome
- In fact, when judging whether someone is a nice or a nasty person, children as young as about 5 years old do show some capacity to associate the actors' intentions with his/her traits (Heyman & Gelman, 1998)

Tema (the actor) plays with a hose and hits Ashira (the recipient) with water.

Heyman & Gelman (1998)



Tema plays with a hose and hits Ashira with water.



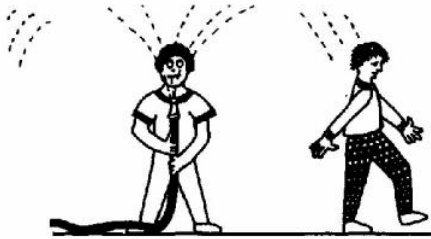
Ashira is happy because she was really hot and wanted to cool off.



Ashira is upset because she is in a hurry to get somewhere and will have to change clothes.

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Motive of the actor

Positive: Tema thought that Ashira would be happy to cool off

Negative: Tema thought that Ashira would be upset about getting wet

Incidental: Tema wanted to have fun shooting water all around

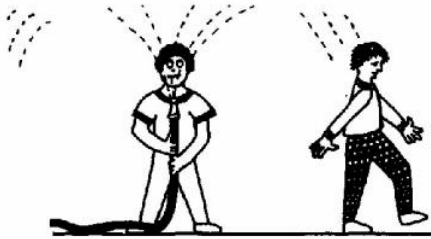
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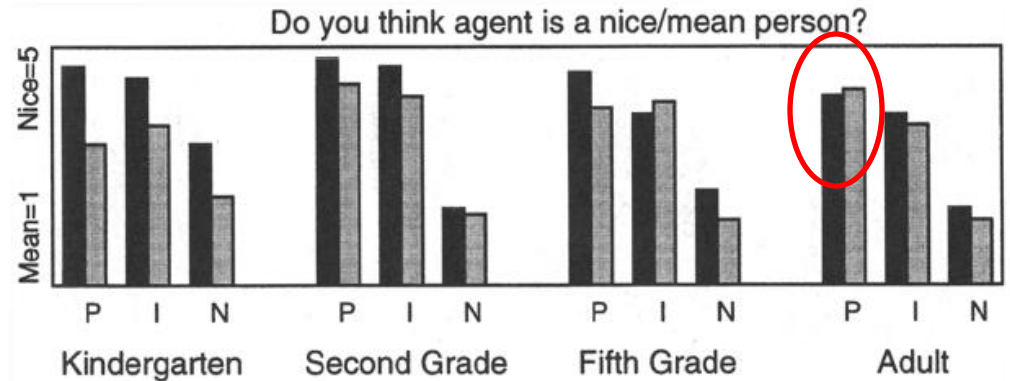
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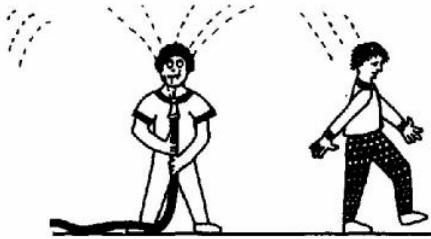


P Positive motive
I Incidental motive
N Negative motive

Positive outcome
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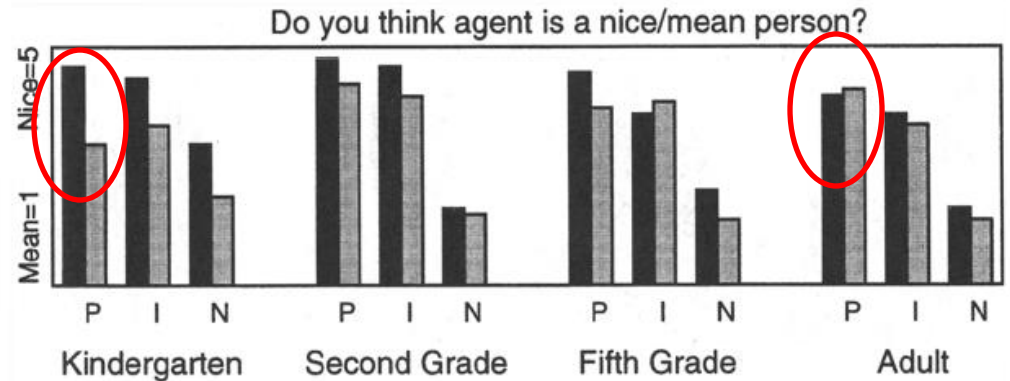
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But the outcome does matter in terms of behaviour...remorse for unintentional harm?

P Positive motive
I Incidental motive
N Negative motive

Positive outcome
Negative outcome

Lecture quiz

- Which of the following best represents how a 6-year-old understands the roles of consequences and social norms (conventions) in judging the morality of acts?
 - a) Billy broke a cup so he must be naughty
 - b) Billy is only naughty if he broke the cup on purpose
 - c) Billy tried to break the cup, but it didn't break so he isn't naughty
 - d) Billy is only naughty if he broke the cup by accident
 - e) Billy is naughty for breaking the cup, more so because he did it on purpose.

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Children's moral understanding

Intentions and motives

- So Piaget's deep assumption is somewhat incorrect, young children DO in fact balance motive
- In fact, when judging whether someone is a nice or a nasty person, children as young as about 5 years old do show some capacity to associate the actors' intentions with his/her traits (Heyman & Gelman, 1998)
- However, their performance is not identical to adults; they do weigh outcome more heavily than adults
- We will come back to children's understanding of people as nice or nasty, good or bad (which is essentially a moral decision)
- But first, let us ask, can we use emotion attributions to directly access children's moral thinking?



1



2



3



4

Moral emotions

Nunner-Winkler & Sodian (1988)

- Question 1: Is it wrong to steal?
4 years: Yes
8 years: Yes

Moral emotions

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- Question 2: How do you feel when you steal something that you want?
4 years: good
8 years: bad (guilty or ashamed)

Moral emotions

Nunner-Winkler & Sodian (1988)

- Question 1: Is it wrong to steal?
4 years: Yes
8 years: Yes
- Question 2: How do you feel when you steal something that you want?
4 years: good
8 years: bad (guilty or ashamed)
- Nunner-Winkler & Sodian's task is a benchmark task because it appears to show that, despite their awareness of moral rules, 4-year-olds do not understand the emotionally binding nature of moral rules, whereas 8-year-olds do
- (We will return to this idea toward the end of the lecture)

Children's moral understanding

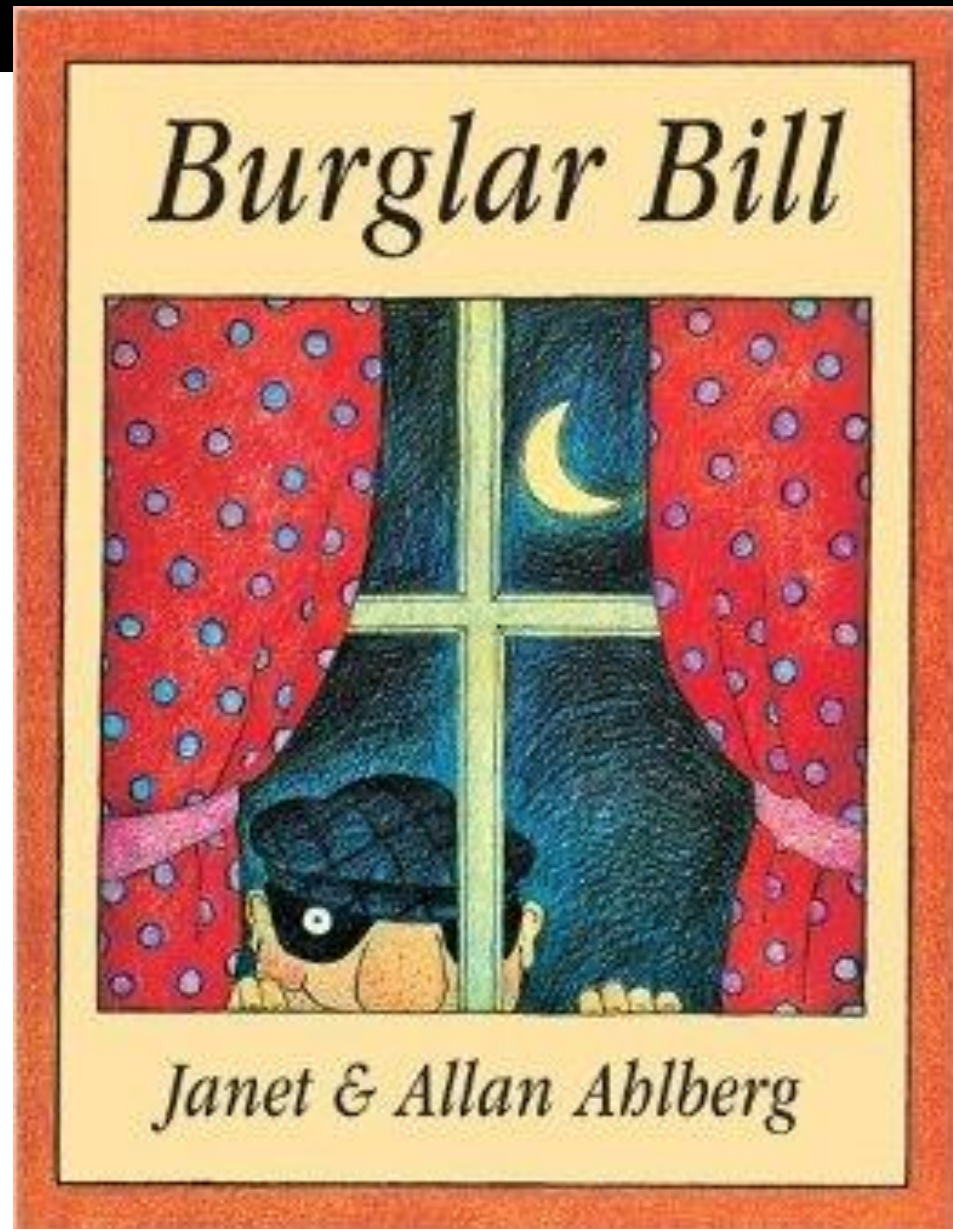
Intentions and motives

- How do children understand intentions in Nunner-Winkler and Sodian's (1988) HV task?

- Question 1: Is it wrong to steal?
4 years: Yes
8 years: Yes
- Question 2: How do you feel when you steal something that you want?
4 years: good
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- Yuill and colleagues (1996) found that when children between 5 and 7 years of age were directed to a transgressor's wish (e.g., to cause harm/to steal) they subsequently attributed more intensely positive emotions to the protagonist's successful action (= stronger HV phenomenon!) than when they were first directed to a moral evaluation of the act itself and then asked to make the emotion attribution
- So even 5-year-olds seem to attuned to the transgressor's intent

Children's moral understanding
Intentions and motives

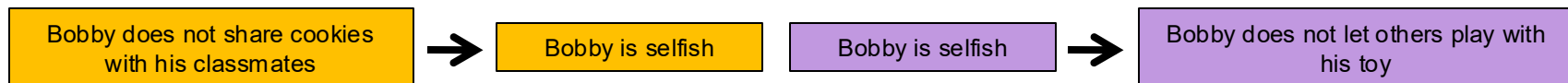


Children's moral understanding: Personality

Intentions and motives

Children's predictions of others' behaviors on the basis of past actions: the mediating role of *personality*

- The process of making behaviour-to-behaviour inferences can be decomposed into two components: behaviour-to-trait inferences and trait-to-behaviour predictions (Liu, Gelman, & Wellman, 2007)
- 4 to 5 years of age: make both behaviour-to-trait inferences AND trait-to-behaviour predictions separately



- 7 to 8 years of age: put the two processes together to make behaviour-to-behaviour inferences

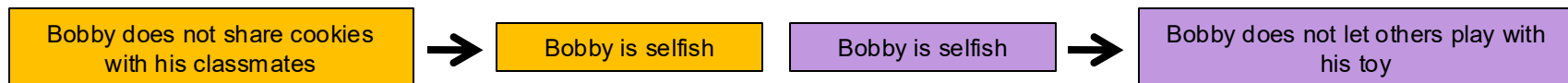


Children's moral understanding: Personality

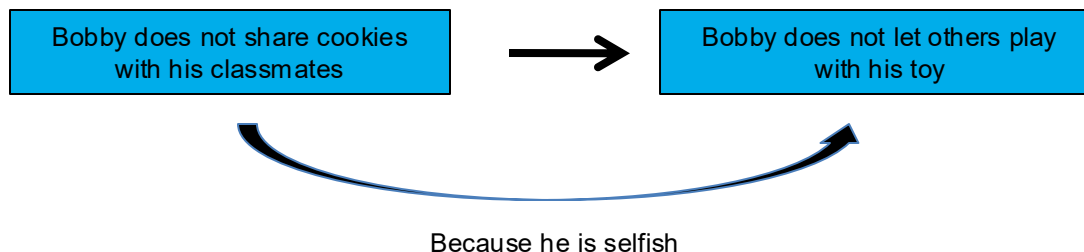
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Children's moral understanding

Summary

- Young children, as young as 4 or 5, are attuned to intentions and motives
- However, they do not privilege intention and motive as much as their older counterparts
- They understand that the actor in the HV scenario is a bad person, motivated by bad intentions, but ...
- ... they don't so easily balance their awareness of right/wrong and emotional concerns as older kids
- Nevertheless, from about 5, children are starting to make enduring assumptions about people's character on the basis of their actions

Where are we up to?

- Children are able to identify the moral domain very early (e.g., Smetana) – but what does that imply?
- We've seen that the Happy Victimizer task allows a distinction to be made between children who attribute moral emotions and those who don't – but what does that imply?
- We've seen that very strong arguments have been put forward for the emotional basis of morality – but that doesn't seem to be enough of a story, we need to know about children's capacity to judge the person's intention as *good* or *bad*
- We've seen that even very young children are sensitive to people's intentions, although they don't seem to put the same emphasis on motives and intentions as older children and adults

Where are we up to?

- We've said, contrary to Piaget, that children are able to identify the moral domain very early (e.g., Smetana) – but what does that imply?
- We've seen that the Happy Victimizer task allows a distinction to be made between children who attribute moral emotions and those who don't – but what does that imply? IS THERE MORE TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS PARADIGM?
- We've seen that very strong arguments have been put forward for the emotional basis of morality – but that doesn't seem to be enough of a story, we need to know about children's capacity to judge the person's intention as good or bad
- We've seen that even very young children are sensitive to people's intentions, although they don't seem to put the same emphasis on motives and intentions as older children and adults

MALTI & KRETTENAUER (2013):

The relation of moral emotion attribution to prosocial and antisocial behavior

Child Development, 84(2), 397 - 412

- The HV task seems to tell us a lot – it balances understanding of events and motives (the cognitive part) with emotional outcomes (the affective part)
- There is a consistent relation between moral emotion attribution (on the HV task) and social outcomes

More (stronger) moral emotions = more prosocial / less antisocial

Fewer (weaker) moral emotions = less prosocial / more antisocial

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Conducted a meta-analysis of 4 -20 year olds

42 studies with > 8000 participants

MALTI & KRETTENAUER (2013):

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Child Development, 84(2), 397 - 412

Results

- There was a moderately strong relation between moral emotion attribution and antisocial behavior: More moral children (i.e., fewer HV responses) showed less antisocial behavior
- There was a weaker relation between moral emotion attribution and prosocial behavior: More moral children (i.e., fewer HV responses) showed more prosocial behavior
- *Moral self-concept in which you do not find the consequences of moral transgressions to be very personally emotionally binding*

End.

Additional materials: filial affections

to eat. The feeling of pleasure from society is probably an extension of the parental or filial affections, since the social instinct seems to be developed by the young remaining for a long time with their parents; and this extension may be attributed in part to habit, but chiefly to natural selection. With those animals which were benefited by living in close association, the individuals which took the greatest pleasure in society would best escape various dangers; whilst those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers. With respect to the origin of the parental and filial affections, which apparently lie at the base of the social instincts, we know not the steps by which they have been gained; but we may infer that it has been to a large extent through natural selection. So it has almost certainly

Additional materials:

Sympathy

been with the unusual and opposite feeling of hatred between the nearest relations, as with the worker-bees which kill their brother-drones, and with the queen-bees which kill their daughter-queens; the desire to destroy their nearest relations having been in this case of service to the community. Parental affection, or some feeling which replaces it, has been developed in certain animals extremely low in the scale, for example, in star-fishes and spiders. It is also occasionally present in a few members alone in a whole group of animals, as in the genus *Forficula*, or earwigs.

The all-important emotion of sympathy is distinct from that of love. A mother may passionately love her sleeping and passive infant, but she can hardly at such times be said to feel sympathy for it. The love of a man for his dog is distinct from sympathy, and so is that of a dog for his master. Adam Smith formerly argued, as has Mr. Bain recently, that the basis of sympathy lies in our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure. Hence, "the sight of another person en-²¹ during hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in us some recollection of "these states, which are painful even in idea." We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved. In like manner we are led to participate in the pleasures of others.²¹ But I cannot see how this view explains the fact that sympathy is excited, in an immeasurably stronger degree, by a beloved, than by an indifferent person. The mere sight of suffering, independently of love, would suffice to call up in us vivid recollections and associations. The explanation may lie in the fact that, with all animals, sympathy is directed solely towards the members of the same community, and therefore towards known, and more or less beloved members, but not to all the individuals of the same species. This fact is not more surprising than that the fears of many animals should be directed against special enemies. Species which are not social, such as lions and tigers, no doubt feel sympathy for the suffering of their own young, but not for that of any other animal. With

²¹ See the first and striking chapter in Adam Smith's 'Theory of Moral Sentiments.' Also Mr. Bain's 'Mental and Moral Science,' 1868, p. 244, and 275-282. Mr. Bain states, that "sympathy is, indirectly, a source of pleasure to the sympathiser;" and he accounts for this through reciprocity. He remarks that "the person benefited,

"or others in his stead, may make "up, by sympathy and good offices "returned, for all the sacrifice." But if, as appears to be the case, sympathy is strictly an instinct, its exercise would give direct pleasure, in the same manner as the exercise, as before remarked, of almost every other instinct.

mankind, selfishness, experience, and imitation, probably add, as Mr. Bain has shewn, to the power of sympathy; for we are led by the hope of receiving good in return to perform acts of sympathetic kindness to others; and sympathy is much strengthened by habit. In however complex a manner this feeling may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.

It is, however, impossible to decide in many cases whether certain social instincts have been acquired through natural selection, or are the indirect result of other instincts and faculties, such as sympathy, reason, experience, and a tendency to imitation; or again, whether they are simply the result of long-continued habit. So remarkable an instinct as the placing sentinels to warn the community of danger, can hardly have been the indirect result of any of these faculties; it must, therefore, have been directly acquired. On the other hand, the habit followed by the males of some social animals of defending the community, and of attacking their enemies or their prey in concert, may perhaps have originated from mutual sympathy; but courage, and in most cases strength, must have been previously acquired, probably through natural selection.

Of the various instincts and habits, some are much stronger than others; that is, some either give more pleasure in their performance, and more distress in their prevention, than others; or, which is probably quite as important, they are, through inheritance, more persistently followed, without exciting any special feeling of pleasure or pain. We are ourselves conscious that some habits are much more difficult to cure or change than others. Hence a struggle may often be observed in animals between different instincts, or between an instinct and some habitual disposition; as when a dog rushes after a hare, is rebuked, pauses, hesitates, pursues again, or returns ashamed to his master; or as between the love of a female dog for her young puppies and for her master,—for she may be seen to slink away to them, as if half ashamed of not accompanying her master. But the most curious instance known to me of one instinct getting the better of another, is the migratory instinct conquering the maternal instinct. The former is wonderfully strong; a confined bird will at the proper season beat her breast against the wires of her cage, until it is bare and bloody. It causes young salmon to leap out of the fresh water, in which they could

Additional materials: habit

behind it a very vivid impression. It is clear that many instinctive desires, such as that of hunger, are in their nature of short duration; and after being satisfied, are not readily or vividly recalled. *Thirdly*, after the power of language had been acquired, and the wishes of the community could be expressed, the common opinion how each member ought to act for the public good, would naturally become in a paramount degree the guide to action. But it should be borne in mind that however great weight we may attribute to public opinion, our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy, which, as we shall see, forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone. *Lastly*, habit in the individual would ultimately play a very important part in guiding the conduct of each member; for the social instinct, together with sympathy, is, like any other instinct, greatly strengthened by habit, and so consequently would be obedience to the wishes and judgment of the community. These several subordinate propositions must now be discussed, and some of them at considerable length.