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The moral codes and ethical principles humans follow allow for guidance, reasonable judgement, as well as values that are salient to live by. Our morality provides a multi-faceted framework that directs our lives and gives them meaning. Unquestionably, a world without morality and ethics may as well be a world of chaos and disorder: societies have intricately interlaced systems of ethics and moral principles for man to live by, providing a successful route to development, progression, and fairness for a better future. Of course, we must consider the origins of morality and ask the prominent question –where does it come from? Furthermore, what is the role of morals today, and does technology influence the way we act toward others?

We can look no further than *The Righteous Mind* by Johnathan Haidt, an evolutionary psychologist, where he proposes his *Moral Foundations Theory* in response to this problem. Essentially, Haidt begs the question of why certain morals are shared amongst cultures, despite the vast differences and differentiations across modern societies, and the impact of modern political systems and technologies on morality as a whole. Haidt reasons we have “intuitive ethics”, that is to say, moral foundations such as care, fairness, loyalty, equality, and so on that have evolved with us throughout time that have helped us survive, stratify ourselves, and reproduce. Furthermore, these moral foundations have helped us build institutions and narratives that bind us together but could potentially blind us to other systems of thought. While this theory may seem strong on the surface, there are a few weaknesses that can be exploited. If Haidt’s theory of morality is unfitting, then he fails to consider arguments for objective morality, as well as how morality strictly only binds us, as his argument is normative, not descriptive like he

claims. By observing Haidt's argument regarding morality, we can then consider the implications and role of morals today, and if technology plays a role in moral cultivation.

To recapitulate, morality provides a multi-faceted structure that directs our lives and gives them importance and value. According to Haidt, each human possesses an innate set of moral values that do so. They allow us to come to moral judgements, (and although these judgements arrive post-hoc, they *are* ample judgements nonetheless). However, this view on moral judgement-making does not take into consideration moral subjectivity. To accurately describe this, we must devise an argument that can exploit this weakness and criticize it respectively, and we will do so using the "if p then q" construct. It can be explicated as follows:

If humans possess innate, evolutionarily-wired moral foundations, then they arrive at their own moral judgements. If humans arrive at their own moral judgements, then no moral judgement is alike. If no moral judgement is alike, each human appeals to moral subjectivity, which can devalue moral issues that are more complicated than care, loyalty, fairness, and so on.

Consider this. The Holocaust was an inherently evil, wicked, and malicious set of events targeted towards human beings and their welfare, life, and prosperity. Person A, by the product of evolutionary, inherent moral foundations within them, says the Holocaust was bad and unequivocally evil. Person B, by the product of evolutionary, inherent moral foundations within them, says the Holocaust was a good thing and had its benefits. Both person A and B appeal to Haidt's theory of morality, so what's the problem? It would appear that person B's moral judgement strips the Holocaust of its worth, since they see no problem in it. After all, if it is just their opinion or moral judgement against mine, then atrocious events such as the Holocaust have no value. That is to say, the Holocaust has so much value because an objective standard says so,

and when we arrive at separate moral judgements as the byproduct of evolutionary processes and stratification, we disregard this. Unfortunately, they are mutually exclusive because the necessary rules of logic say so.

Of course, this critique on Haidt can be dangerous as it can bleed into the God argument for moral objectivity, which isn't the focus of this essay. That being said, keeping an open mind to this idea, like all other ideas for the origins of morality, is important. Disproving the moral foundations theory doesn't provide ample evidence for God's existence, just how proving God's existence doesn't disprove the moral foundations theory. Rather, this specific critique is exploiting how different moral judgements that arise in people provide a discrepancy in the rules of logic as well as rules for morality.

Haidt makes an extraordinary claim in support for his theory –morality binds and blinds. To elucidate, Haidt proposes that the moral codes and principles certain societies, groups, or cultures hold can bind them together, but also blind them to the points of view from other groups. This gives rise to fighting, instability, bipartisanship, etc. To Haidt's credit, this is a very strong pillar in his argument –and it makes sense. We naturally blind ourselves to other groups' point of view while preserving our own moral standards or self-interests. This claim, along with the conception that we are "90% chimp and 10% bee", provides a concrete case for our self-interests regarding altruism and how that, when we *do* work for the better of the group, our shared morals therein can blind us to outgroups. Subsequently, this claim is difficult to critique as there is so much evidence for it. However, one must ask, *can* morality blind you? Speaking of morality as a means to its end, and in the truest sense of the word, morality deals with correct conduct, choosing what is right and just, as well as dealing with behavior that enhances one's character. One could remonstrate that it cannot do that while also blinding you to another. Otherwise, it

isn't moral, and by definition it is not morality. Furthermore, one can ask, *should* morality blind you? That is to say, are we really talking about morality and not an opinion, ideology, or idea, that binds us and blinds us? They are not to be confused and shouldn't be confused. It would be a more fitting claim to say, "Systems of belief that humans create using moral principles *can*, but not always, bind and blind us." While clever, and likely correct, writing off morality as a whole with this claim seems superfluous and exaggerative.

Lastly, it is important to note that Haidt's argument for morality is normative in nature, rather than descriptive. In proposing the various moral systems such as care, fairness, loyalty, etc., Haidt argues that his theory for morality does not make these certain moral systems "good", as his claim is descriptive. Haidt reasons, "Morality is innate and highly dependent on environmental influences" (Haidt). This is a normative claim for a few reasons. Firstly, it is suggestive of his viewpoint on morality, and inadvertently states his viewpoint on moral pluralism. That is to say, it is normative with a descriptive assumption. Also, Haidt is stating this claim as if it is an established fact within the scientific community, such as humans having two eyes or a bird being able to fly. It *would* be a descriptive claim if he simply said, "Morality is innate". That is true, without subject to bias, since it *is* innate to all of us. But since he added that it is highly dependent on environmental influences, it became transformed into a normative statement. We do not know that morality is highly dependent on environmental factors, that is simply a theory –after all, it *is* called the moral foundations *theory*. If we knew with 100% certainty, and if it were an established, objective fact such as "the sky is blue", then it would be descriptive. Therefore, this is not a descriptive claim, but a normative one passed off as descriptive in order to fit with the rest of Haidt's theory.

It would seem that Johnathan Haidt provides crucial and sufficient evidence for his theory of moral foundations. While this may be the case, there are a few weaknesses that are easy to find and exploit. That being said, this does not disprove his theory as a whole, as it is a good framework for how humans come to moral judgements and why we reason the way we do. All things considered, with the criticism applied respectively, his theory will still remain one of the strongest in the field and should be displayed in a positive light. Morality is a subject that can be difficult to define, and ethics, moral principles, and virtues can be a difficult framework to follow. If we look at Haidt's reasoning behind his theory, we can extract crucial information to why we behave in certain ways and can apply this to our lives accordingly.

It would seem, interestingly, that the role of morality today exists within a subjective framework. As each society and country follows their own set of morals, the propagation of moral subjectivity and moral isolationism should be duly noted. Undoubtedly, the use of technology has cultivated this phenomenon. We can understand this by appealing to Martin Heidegger and his essay regarding the essence and nature of technology.

For Heidegger, technology's influence runs deeper than the various instruments we use within our everyday life: it is entrenched within the public conscious (Heidegger). By introducing the concept of "enframing", where technology shapes and distorts our perception of the world, he reasons that humans are exploited as merely a resource, or a means to an end. Just like wood from a tree, or from a lumber yard, humans act as a resource to be harvested (Heidegger). For the world to be used via instrumentalization, there seems to be an objective moral problem. If human beings are reduced to mere resources, our intrinsic value is at stake, as well as the well being of others. That is to say, when humans no longer connect with the world in a meaningful way, they may fail to realize the moral and ethical implications of the choices they

make. This is akin to Haidt's proposition of "90% chimp and 10% bee", where humans irrationally make choices that blind us to the other group's perspective. Furthermore, the propagation of technology and its implications within our lives may fundamentally shake our evolutionary moral foundations.

We may think of both Heidegger and Haidt's works as an implicit and indirect call for humans to return to a more authentic and communicative way of living. While Haidt proposes that morality today binds us and blinds us, Heidegger argues that the cultivation of technology reduces us to mere resources, therefore allowing opportunities for moral disillusionment and the misunderstanding of other cultures. We can only begin to see the effects now, and patiently wait for the future of human morality, technology, and its effect on human relationships.

Work Cited

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