

HONESTY AND OTHER VIRTUES ARE BOUNDED TIGHTLY ACROSS NATIONS

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Some months ago I was looking at some studies suggesting honesty in East Asia is much lower than the West. I was highly suspicious. I am going to show you by work of Martin Seligman that these claims are false. I use results from Virtues In Action Surveys, and you might think this is biased because it's self-reported but the questionnaires are over many things. So VIA has 24 measured virtues with theoretical values between 1 and 5. Over 14 countries including China and Japan we get the Honesty statistics:

$$\mu_{Honesty} = 3.854$$

and

$$\sigma_{Honesty} = 0.100$$

That is far too narrow a standard deviation for there to be vast differences in honesty between people in West and East. I will look at this more carefully but from experience looking at statistics of this type I can assure the reader that it is virtually impossible for the honesty measures used to be saying something valuable.

You see, we have been spread away from each other for around 75,000 years, that's in order of 3000 generations. Given that our DNA is fixed in 99.9% locations, it is not possible to have moved far from the Human Nature genetic state a notion that just before dispersal we had some uniform state for our people 75,000 years ago. How much can you change by splitting. One has to have a great deal of suspicion when there are claims about fundamental human nature variables differing vastly by geography.

1. STATISTICS FOR 21 COUNTRIES

The data are from [1]. They emphasized slightly different issues than our focus in just examining the variance of the virtues here.

Besides religiosity the rest have $\sigma < 0.16$. Virtue variation across countries is quite tightly bounded. This is what I would actually expect because we were the same meta-tribe in Africa 75,000 years ago, and 3000 generations would not have vast effects on virtues from this starting points. But this is a good measurement. Our focus here is not complex statistical models but sharp focus on actual values of the standard deviations.

2. CONCLUSION

Human Nature constrains the virtues we can have, and it does so much more tightly than we can guess without measurements. The standard deviations of the character strengths (or virtues) is so small compared to the means across the globe

	virtue	mu	sigma
1	kindness	3.83	0.10
2	fairness	3.95	0.09
3	honesty	3.85	0.08
4	gratitude	3.75	0.14
5	judgment	3.95	0.05
6	love	3.79	0.10
7	humour	3.67	0.08
8	curiosity	3.96	0.12
9	beauty	3.79	0.11
10	creativity	3.77	0.15
11	perspective	3.71	0.11
12	social.intelligence	3.67	0.09
13	leadership	3.68	0.10
14	teamwork	3.58	0.10
15	learning	3.93	0.10
16	bravery	3.59	0.10
17	forgive	3.59	0.12
18	hope	3.52	0.15
19	industry	3.51	0.09
20	religiousness	3.23	0.27
21	zest	3.50	0.11
22	prudence	3.44	0.12
23	modesty	3.30	0.16
24	Self.regulation	3.30	0.09

that we can infer that our virtues cannot easily expand to whatever we like but has a very high probability of staying in very small intervals of the possible values. These are strongly constrained by human genome. In particular not only does human nature exist objectively, but it exists with strong statistical concentration in the 24-dimensional virtues space. We can infer from this that all theories of arbitrary social construction of values can be eliminated. We can also infer from the actual means that various subjective theories of 'bad human nature' can also be eliminated. We can use these to completely clean up our intellectual discourse from the never-ending ideological bickering of various parties none of which had a chance of being right.

REFERENCES

- [1] Nansook Park, Christopher Peterson, Martin Seligman, Character Strengths in Fifty-four Nations and Fifty US States, The Journal of Positive Psychology, July 2006; 1(3): 118–129