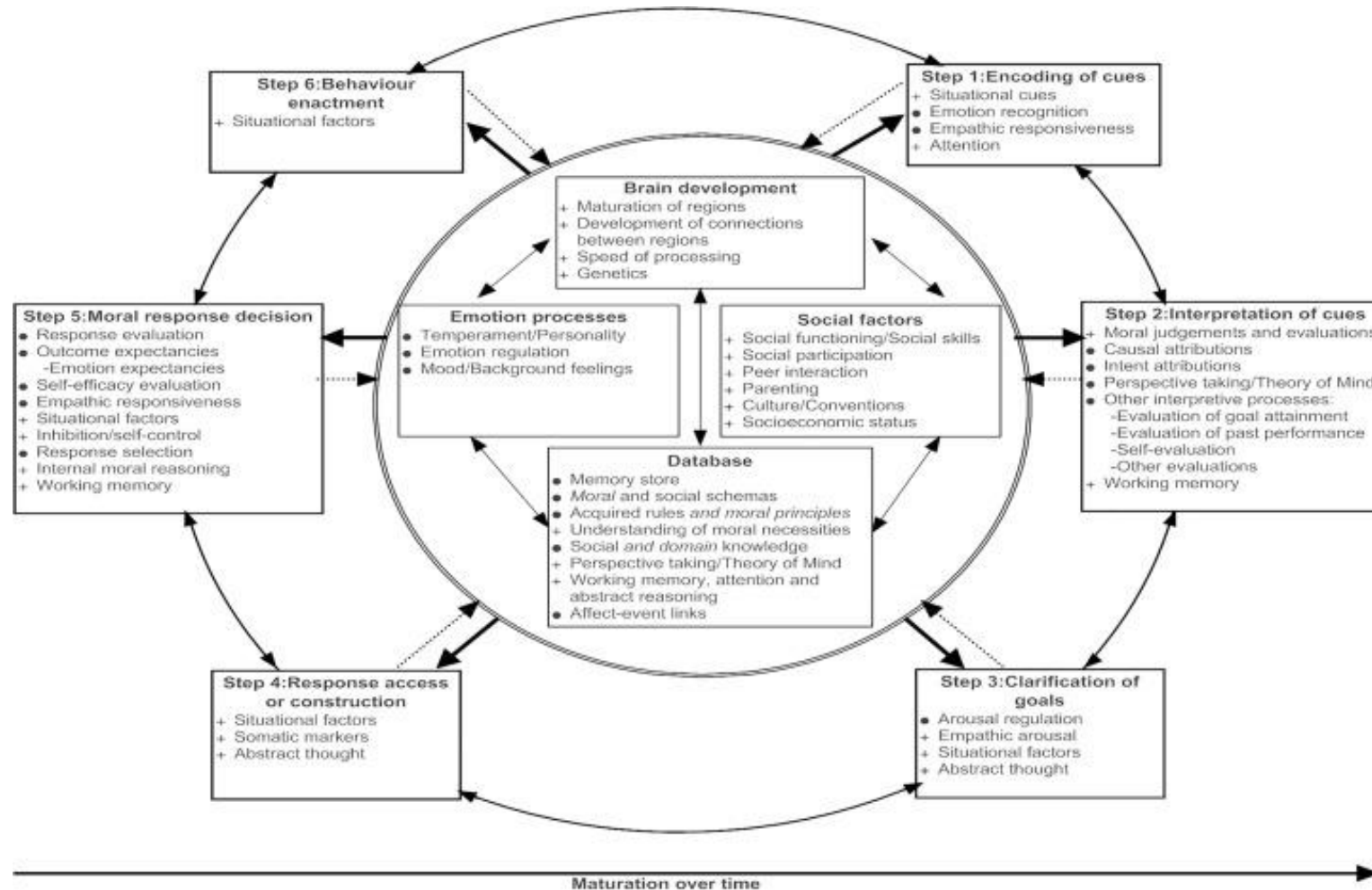# Moral Sentiment

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November 30, 2021

Moral Sentiment

- The idea of a moral sense (as opposed to moral reasoning)
- Methods of ethics and experience
- Moral sentiments v. moral judgements
- Learning ethics

Title Image: https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/4/25/18291925/human-rationality-science-justin-smith

Moral Judgements?

Moral principles are necessary but not sufficient for moral behaviour, (Kohlberg, 1984a)
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027322971830025X

Personal Knowledge

"Feminine moral theory deals a blow to the exclusively rational systems of thought, which have as their grounding an inherent disregard for the inherently personal—and sometimes gender-biased—nature of knowledge construction."
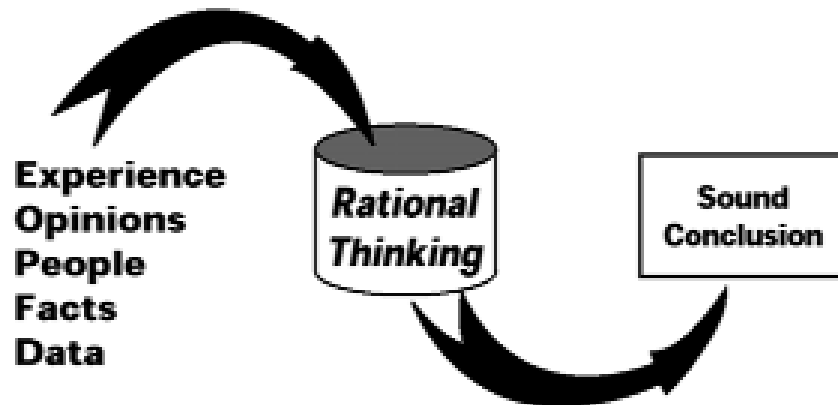

Experience
Opinions
People
Facts
Data

Rational Thinking

Sound Conclusion

Image: https://www.ascd.org/books/analytic-processes-for-school-leaders?chapter=rational-thinking-as-a-process

Craig P. Dunn Brian K. Burton. Ethics of care. Encyclopedia Britannica.
https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-of-care

Hume's Scepticism

"We cannot be motivated to act morally through reason alone, because reason is only concerned with determining truths about objects already existing in the world."

Hume: "There is no view of human life, or of the condition of mankind, from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes…." (Hume, *Dialogues*, part 10)

Rayner, Sam (2005) "Hume's Moral Philosophy," Macalester Journal of Philosophy: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 2.
http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/philo/vol14/iss1/2
http://www.timothyministry.com/2014/11/david-hume-and-problem-of-evil.html
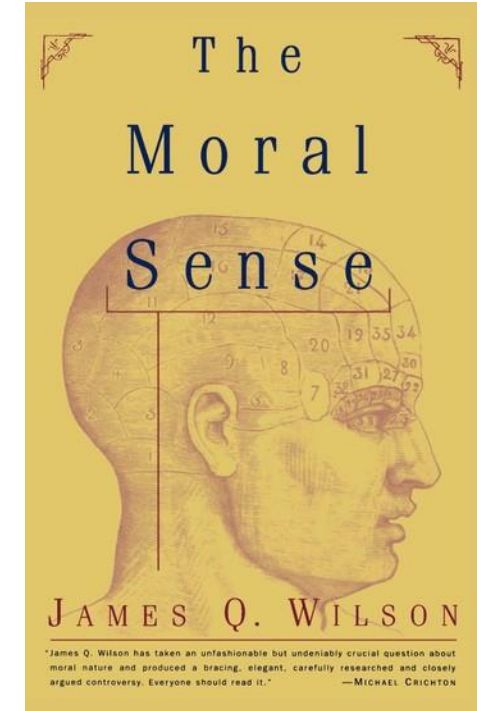https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/dialogues/full-text/part-10/

Ethics Alarms

"Ethics alarms are the feelings in your gut, the twinges in your conscience, and the sense of caution in your brain when situations involving choices of right and wrong are beginning to develop, fast approaching, or unavoidable."

Jack Marshall, https://ethicsalarms.com/about/
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.saimeche.org.za/resource/collection/BFA070FF-C69A-4A96-8106-47BBF81920CE/044-081-PDP-Outcome_8-Conduct_activities_ethically_MJRev0-04112013.pdf

Moral Sense

- "Our moral distinctions depend on our experiencing sentiments or feelings: we do not rely exclusively on the employment of reason to make our moral discernments."

- Note that this is not a theory of innateness or natural morality – the idea is that we learn ethics, but we learn them in such a way that we feel or experience a moral sense, rather than fully formed general principles

Elizabeth S. Radcliffe. (2013). Moral Sentimentalism and the Reasonableness of Being Good
Dans Revue internationale de philosophie 2013/1 (n° 263), pages 9 – 27. https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2013-1-page-9.htm https://www.kobo.com/gr/en/ebook/the-moral-sense

Reference to Sentiment

"To be amiable and to be meritorious; that is, to deserve love and to deserve reward, are the great characters of virtue; and to be odious and punishable, of vice. But all these characters have an immediate reference to the sentiments of others."

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part III, Chapter 1.

See also https://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/adam-smith-a-moral-philosopher/

Moral Sentimentalism

E.g. Jonathan Haidt (2012): moral judgments are for the most part intuitions proximally caused by gut reactions, quick and automatic flashes of affect.

- people are easily dumbfounded when challenged on their moral views
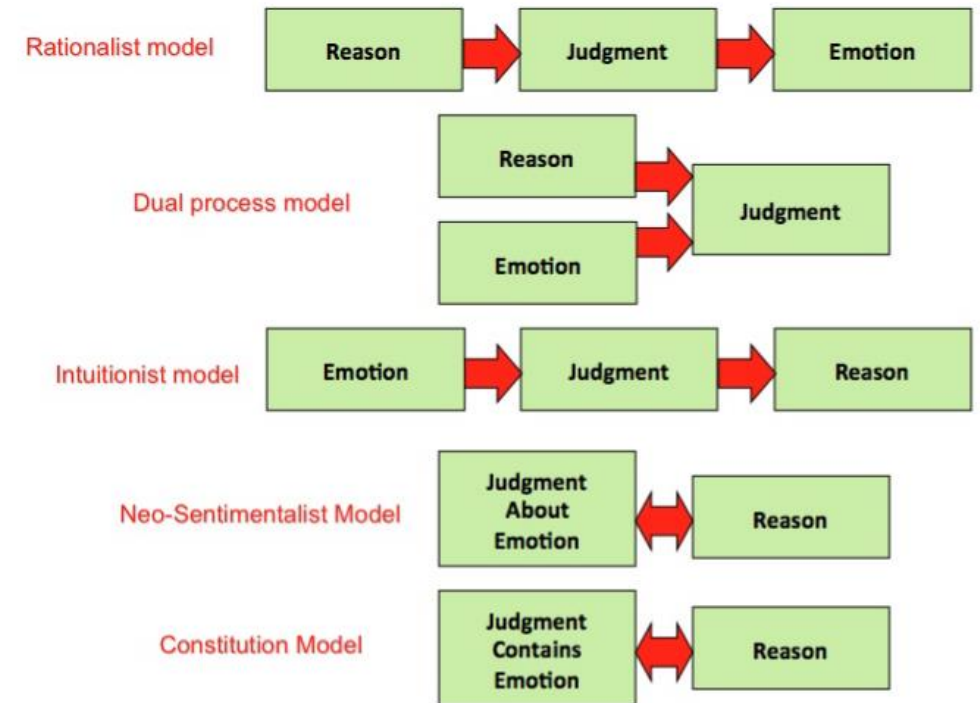- they cannot (Haidt claims) give reasons for why they disapprove

Image: http://www.mit.edu/~shaslang/mprg/PrinzCS.pdf
All quoted from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-sentimentalism/

Ethics as Sentiment

Hume's position has been termed "sentimentalism" because he believes that morality arises from human sentiments. Hume firmly states this position in many areas of this treatise, such as when he says "When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it." (Treatise 3.1.1.26, SBN 468-9)

- "Ethical Sentimentalism promises a conception of morality that is grounded in a realistic account of human psychology, which, correspondingly, acknowledges the central place of emotion in our moral lives."

https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=philo
https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/ethical-sentimentalism/9781107461307-item.html

Ethics and Experience

This (in my view) is a perspective of an ethics that is learned through experience:

- Similar to Hume's moral sentiment
- Often experienced at a subsymbolic level - ethics is not (contra Kant) not a matter of rationality but rather one of sympathy - cf. the post 'The Failure of Reason' I wrote last June
- How we react in a particular case depends on our ethical background and is the result of multiple simultaneous factors, not large-print key statements
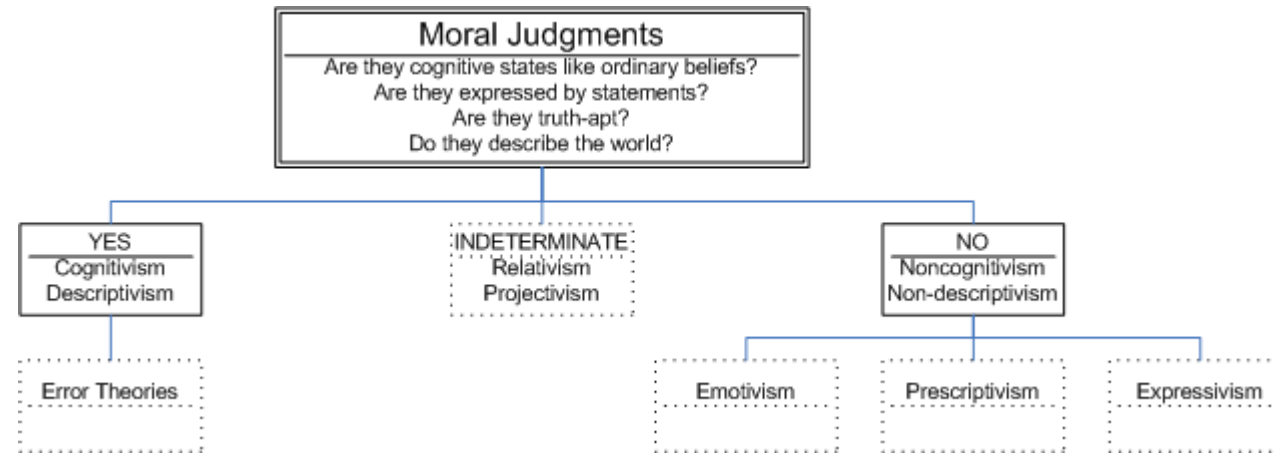
https://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2019/06/the-failure-of-reason.html

Sympathy

- "Hume sees what he calls sympathy as the underlying foundation of the interpersonal nature of human morality. By sympathy Hume is referring to the human ability to convey our moral sentiments to one another and, upon observing the outward effects of someone else's internal moral sentiments, our ability to actually feel those sentiments as though they were our own." E.g. Treatise 2.1.11.8, SBN 319-20)

https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=philo

Moral Sentiments v. Moral Judgements

Glossop makes a very relevant distinction between moral sentiments and moral judgments. Glossop states that sentiments arise from actual sympathy, and by correcting them through reflecting on them with an imagined impartiality we can attempt to make appropriate moral judgments, by adopting the sentiments afforded by the resultant ideal sympathy.

https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=philo
R. Glossop, "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 27 (1967): 527-536.
IEP, 'Moral Realism', https://iep.utm.edu/moralrea/

Expressing Judgements

"Take away the very concept of power - of a capacity to produce or prevent outcomes – and there is nothing left to base a distinctively moral responsibility. But nor is there anything left of something very much part of our conception of rationality – a power of justifications to move us." (Pink, 2020)
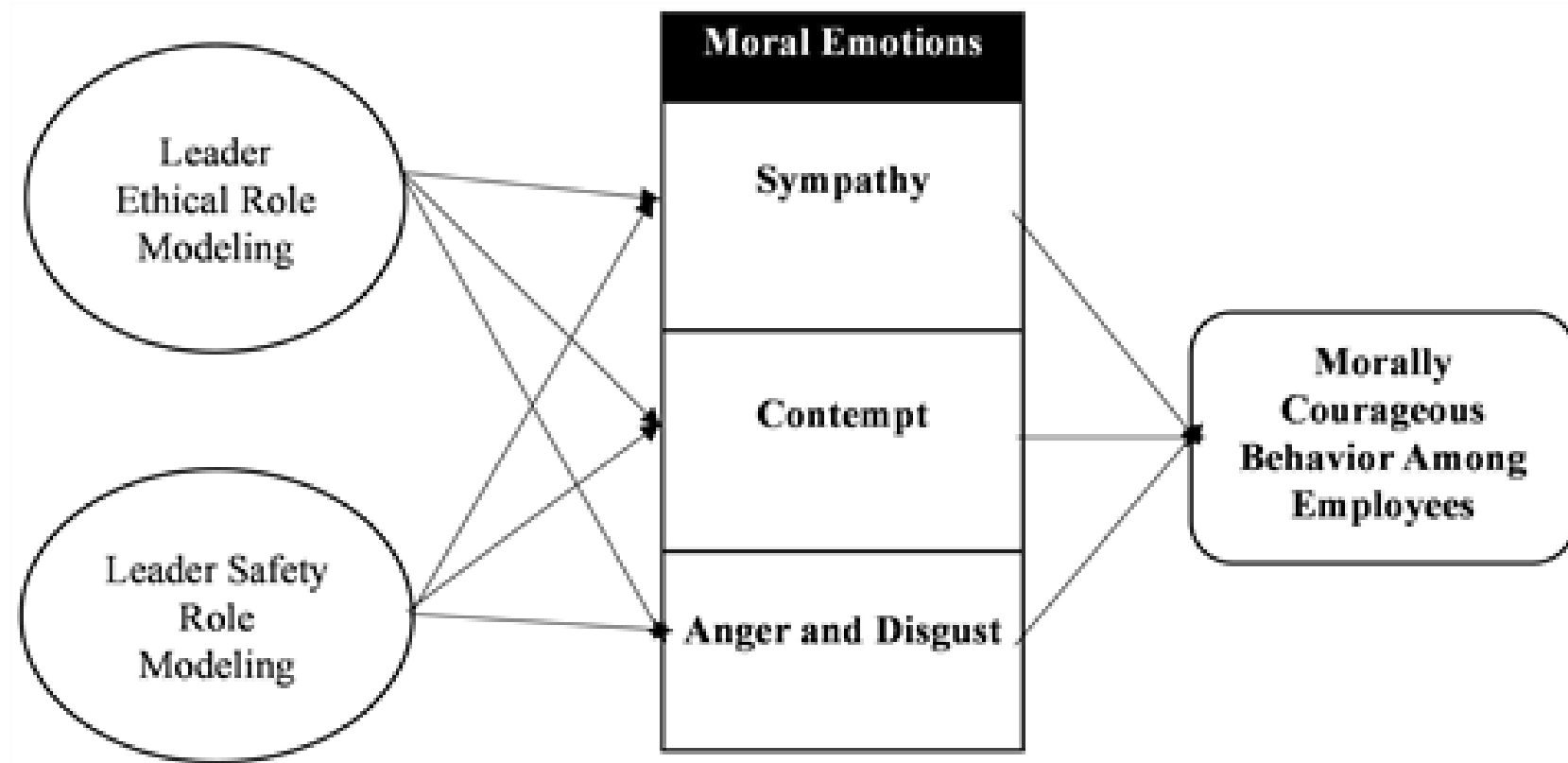
Learning Ethics

- "Hume says that our sense of humanity allows us to form general views about the useful and agreeable (to which the relativist does not subscribe), and that we do so on the basis of conversations and debates in which we must make ourselves mutually intelligible to one another."

- To borrow a phrase, we might say "it takes a community to learn ethics" – all we do, all we experience, is the 'data' from which a person develops an ethical sense

Jacqueline Taylor. (2013). Hume on the Importance of Humanity. Revue internationale de philosophie, 2013/1 (No 263). 81-97. https://www.cairn-int.info/focus-E_RIP_263_0081--hume-on-the-importance-of-humanity.htm

Modeling Ethics

"...the mediation of moral sympathy, moral contempt and moral anger and disgust, in the relationship between leader ethical role modeling and morally courageous behaviors"

It takes a Community

- It's a matter of a community as an entire system, rather than one individual making a decision

- We need to keep in mind how we're all connected

- What's important here is how we learn to be ethical in the first place (as opposed to the specific statement of a set of rules defining what it is to be ethical)

The Ethical Mind

- A person's mind is at least as complex as social networks
  - What they learn is going to be based on the data - ie., the totality of the input
  - This isn't something that can be corrected simply by rote and by rules
- We need to provide an ethical culture (rather than emphasis on following the rules)
  - Diversity of perspective to create a wider sense of community
  - Encouragement of openness and interaction (art, drama, etc) to develop empathy and capacity to see from the perspective of others

Innovation

Responsible, ethical & accountable

Openess & Transparency

Engagement & Empowerment: intrapreneurism