

# Emotion and Morality (Pt.II)



Psychology of Emotion  
Lecture 14  
Professor David Pizarro

# Empathy: Physiological Mechanisms

- Emotional Contagion- “catching” the emotions of others.
  - Motor Mimicry
  - Facial Feedback

# Motor Mimicry

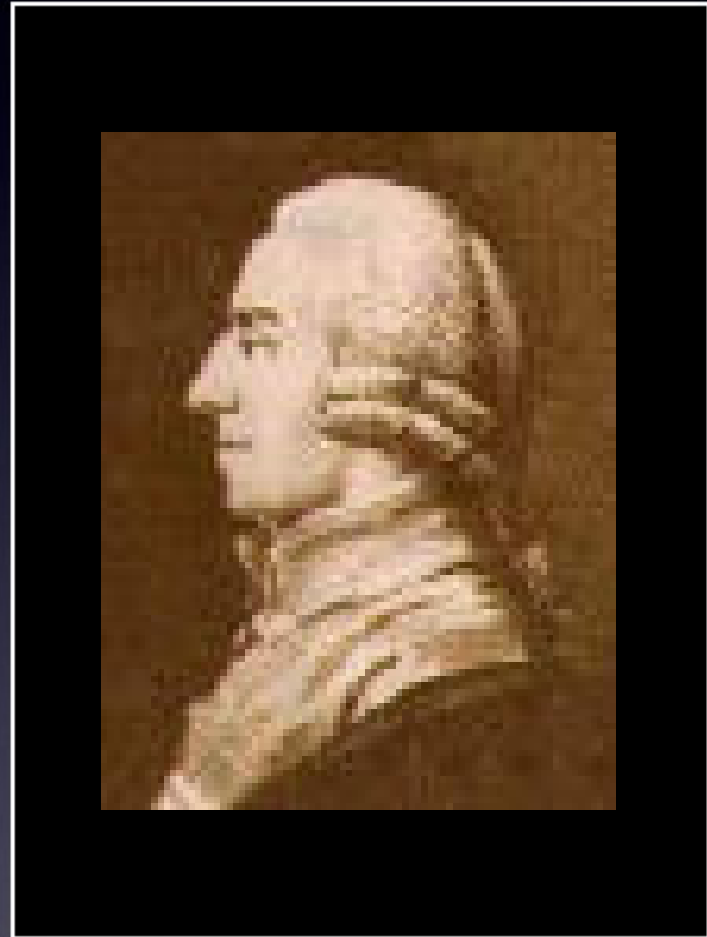
- We tend to imitate the motor responses of others.
- Facial muscles respond to the emotional expressions of others.
- “Chameleon effect”--mimicry leads others to like us.

# Facial/Postural Feedback

- As we imitate the motor movements of others, we begin to feel the emotions associated with these movements.
- Smiles (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988)
  - Far Side Cartoons
  - Holding pencil in mouth (in lips vs. clenched in teeth)

# Empathy through Perspective Taking

“By the imagination, we place ourselves in the other’s situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter, as it were, into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some ideas of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”



# Ways to motivate Perspective Taking

## **Direct:**

- “How would you feel if you ...”
- “Try to see it from their point of view  
...”

# Promoting Empathy in Children



- Nancy Eisenberg
- Development of Empathy

# Empathic Preaching

(Eisenberg-Berg & Geisheker, 1979)

- Children (3rd & 4th grade) exposed to an adult who won money and decided to donate to UNICEF
- Adult then “preached”:
  - **Empathic:** “Well now, I think that people should share with the poor children. They would be so happy and excited if they could buy food and toys. After all, poor children have almost nothing. If everyone would help these children maybe they wouldn't look so sad” (there was a UNICEF poster of despondent children next to the donation box).



# Empathic Preaching (cont'd)

- **Normative:** Well now, I think that people should share with the poor children. It's really good to donate to poor boys and girls. Yes, we should give some money to others poorer than ourselves. Sharing is the right thing to do.
- **Neutral:** In the neutral condition, the adult merely discussed the game.

# Empathic preaching (cont'd)

- “**Empathic**” preaching condition children donated more money than other two conditions.
- No statistically significant difference between “**normative**” and “**neutral**” conditions.
- Effects shown to last up to 8 weeks.

# Ways to motivate Perspective Taking

## **Indirect:**

- Representing something as similar to more familiar objects of empathy
  - Fetus: similar to child
  - Animal: similar to human
  - Stranger: similar to family member
    - [metaphors of “brotherhood”, “sisterhood”]

# Empathic Biases

- Local (familiarity, genetic relatedness, similarity)
- Past experience
- Salience

# Fairly easy to circumvent empathy...

- Avert your gaze (e.g., change the channel)
- Describe others as dissimilar or non-familiar







Gripland  
Nijpland  
Engeland

ons antwoord:  
Het geweer  
ter hand!

**Vlamingen  
alle in de SS Langemarck!**

LANGEMARCK  
KORTLIJK



# Empathy and the GOOD

- No empathy = no moral concern
- Perhaps possible to reason about principles but just *wouldn't care* as much.
- Motivation to alleviate suffering would be much lower.
- Robots, Vulcans, calculators, and all other things incapable of empathy would just not be GOOD in the human sense

# The Emotional Roots of Evil

- We talked about how emotions can naturally lead to positive, prosocial judgments and behavior--how they make us GOOD.
- But an even more pressing question is what leads to bad behaviors--are there emotional processes that make us do really BAD things?

# Sidenote: Evil/Immoral?

- How do we determine what is IMMORAL?
  - Isn't this a philosophical question?
  - Relativism is tempting, but isn't a satisfying philosophical stance.
- We can do okay by avoiding the philosophical question
  - Murder, rape, unnecessary torture, stealing, etc... all pretty bad stuff.

# Psychology of Bad and Evil

- Some people seem emotionally “broken” (psychopathy)
- BUT: Situational forces can make ANY of us do things that many would consider immoral.
- Manipulating the emotional mechanisms of normal people can make them commit the most trivial infractions or the most inhuman atrocities.
- This contradicts the most popular views of what “evil” is.

# Popular View

Immoral acts are committed by “Evil People” with bad intentions and nefarious desires.



# How might emotions make people EVIL?



# Moral Emotions

(Haidt, 2003)

## **POSITIVE**

- *Other-suffering*
  - Empathy and related responses
- *Self-conscious Emotions*
  - Shame
  - Guilt
  - Embarrassment
- *Other-praising*
  - Gratitude
  - Awe and Elevation

# Moral Emotions

(Haidt, 2003)

## **NEGATIVE**

- *Other-condemning*
  - Contempt
  - Anger
  - Disgust



# “Evil” People

- There is a group of people who seem to have their normal emotional impulses “turned off” to begin with
  - Psychopaths/Sociopaths/Antisocial Personality Disorder
  - 3.6% in general population (5.5% in men vs. 1.9% in women)
- There seems to be very little hope for these people...

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# WITHOUT



# CONSCIENCE

THE DISTURBING WORLD OF  
THE PSYCHOPATHS AMONG US

ROBERT D. HARE, PhD

"Comprehensive and fascinating...." —*Timothy Hunter, Cleveland Plain-Dealer*

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ROBERT D. HARE, PhD

# DSM-IV Criteria for Psychopathy

- Must be at least 18 years old
- Three or more of the following:
  - Conduct disorder before the age of 15
  - Disregard for the rights of others
  - Impulsive, irresponsible behavior
  - Deceitfulness
  - Irritability and aggressiveness
  - Reckless disregard for the safety of others
  - Lack of remorse
  - Low tolerance for frustration and boredom

# Psychopathy Checklist

- Factor 1: "Aggressive narcissism"
  - Glibness/superficial charm
  - Grandiose sense of self-worth
  - Pathological lying
  - Cunning/manipulative
  - Lack of remorse or guilt
  - Shallow affect
  - Callous/lack of empathy
  - Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
  - Promiscuous sexual behavior
- Factor 2: "Socially deviant lifestyle"
  - Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
  - Parasitic lifestyle
  - Poor behavioral control
  - Lack of realistic, long-term goals
  - Impulsivity
  - Irresponsibility
  - Juvenile delinquency
  - Early behavior problems
  - Many short-term marital relationships
  - Revocation of conditional release

# Precursors in childhood

- Children with conduct disorder show reliable signs of adult psychopathy
  - Cruelty to animals
  - Impulsiveness
  - Vandalism, theft, truancy
  - Aggression toward peers

# Psychopathy primarily a deficit of emotions

- Consistent finding of lack of emotionality in response to aversive events
  - Startle-elicited blink response
  - Aversive noise blast paradigms
- *Callous and unemotional* traits responsible for these findings