

# Moral Psychology // Spring 2021

## Handout 7

### Condemnation and coordination: DeScioli and Kurzban II

**MORALITY AND CONDEMNATION.** Suppose that you have some evolved adaptations that regulate your behaviour. But why would these adaptations favour regulation of the behaviour of others? DeScioli and Kurzban argue that this explanatory route is difficult.

2009.289c2

By contrast, suppose we begin with adaptations that regulate behaviour of others. Specifically, we speculate that there are mechanisms to praise and condemn others. Then we can explain how conscience has evolved. It is a mechanism that regulates the actor's behaviour so as to avoid condemnation and attract praise.

2009.290c1

**THE ROLE OF HYPOCRISY.** The ubiquity of hypocrisy is a key piece of evidence in support of the condemnation-first theory. Possible explanations of hypocrisy:

*Traditional moralistic:* Insufficient moral training. But this view seems too optimistic.

*Learned strategy:* Children learn early on that their behaviour should be strategic where appearance counts for everything.

Bat.232

*Condemnation first:* DeScioli and Kurzban argue that conscience is an adaptation that regulates the actor's behaviour in the view of the condemnation by others. When condemnation is likely, the actor follows what is 'right'—that is, what others are likely to judge as right. When condemnation is unlikely, conscience disengages, and the actor follows his perceived self-interest, which is often at variance with what is 'right'.

2009.290c2

**THIRD PARTY COORDINATION.** Intervention is risky. In dyadic disputes it's straightforward to account for punishment. But experience shows that people often intervene as third-party, as bystanders. This requires performing cognitively complex tasks: actors must calculate the costs of joining the losing side and the benefits of joining the winning side in a conflict with multiple players. In addition, the third parties must estimate what side *other* third parties will choose. This is the problem of coordination. Different strategies are available:

2009.292c2

*Bandwagoning:* Third parties join the most powerful individual (whose power has already been established). Advantage: coordination. Disadvantage: despotism and exploitation by the powerful individual.

2012.5c1

*Alliance building:* Third parties join their preexistent alliances based on loyalty. Advantage: no despotism. Disadvantage: protracted conflicts.

2012.5c2

*Correlated equilibrium:* Third parties coordinate based on some publicly available signal. Flipping a coin is one such signal. Advantages: no despotism, no protracted conflicts. Disadvantages: violation of loyalty.

2012.7

The disadvantage of the correlated equilibrium is, in general, the problem of motivation. In bandwagoning, it's plausible that you'll be tempted to enter on the side of a powerful individual and enjoy the short-term benefits and avoid short-term risks. In alliance building, again, there will be evolved emotional motivators encouraging you to join your kin (possibly friends with a history of mutual helping). A 'bare signal' like, for example, coin flipping doesn't offer comparable motives, certainly not those that would overcome the competing motives. Therefore, not every public signal could effectively coordinate the participation of the third parties.



A game-theoretic argument to show that bare signaling isn't the optimal strategy: The payoffs of different strategies for a particular actor depend on what strategy other parties have adopted. The third parties will want to align their strategy with other bystanders, and all parties of the conflict (perpetrator, victim, different third parties) will try to influence the choices of others. That is not what bare signaling can achieve. (I would amend the Figure 2 in 2012.8c2 to reflect this further complexity.)

2012.8c1

On occasions, however, a bare signal may fulfil the purpose if other factors are too weak or cancel each other out. Thus trial by combat or ordeal, or the Roman decimation, were happily used on some occasions—though at the same time, when considered in abstract, our intuitions militate against these forms of coordination.

2012.14c1

**MORAL COGNITION AS A COORDINATION ADAPTATION.** We are looking, then, for a public signal that wouldn't be a bare signal. If manipulation of other parties is a factor for equilibrium, then one possibility is for a signal to depend on the features of the conflict. These features will be the data on which to base your manipulation.

Suggestion: the conflict is represented as a collection of action that are arranged on a scale of 'wrongs'. Moral cognition is adapted to represent the conflict in this way. The moral(ised) scale of wrongs is negotiated and debated (possibly in advance), as is the classification of particular actions in accordance with this scale (in real time).

2012.8c1

2012.8c2

So understood, moral cognition will have these features:

*Focus on actions:* We examine the properties of actions to determine which side to join and to predict which side the others will join.

2012.9c1

*Continuous moralisation:* New domains of behaviour may open up for 'moralistic development'. New kinds of actions may be drafted in support of a more effective coordination.

2012.9c2

*Victimless crimes:* Once moralised, actions will have to fit the perpetrator-victim template. If no obvious victim is in the vicinity, dumbfounding follows, with attempts to locate the victim nevertheless (Haidt's sex with chicken, harmless incest etc.)

2012.10c1

*Predilection for punishment:* Punishment by an actor  $x$  serves as a signal for other parties to indicate which side  $x$  has joined. This explains why moralistic punishment tends to be public.

2012.10c1

*Appearance of impartiality:* Moral cognition does not demand actual impartiality. This is because impartiality is, again, a signal for others. It is essentially an instrument to recruit others to your side (or rather, one side), and to signal to them your reliability as an ally. At the same time, other factors in the conflict, like kin ties, incline you toward partiality. As long as a veneer of impartiality is maintained, you can afford to indulge in secret partiality.

2012.11c1