Disgust-sensitivity and Moral Attitudes in Japanese College-students

Erlandsson, Arvid

2011

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Arvid Erlandsson
Arvid.Erlandsson@psychology.lu.se
Lund University, Department of Psychology

Introduction

Disgust relate to moral attitudes. The most common finding is that people judge moral wrongdoings harsher when they feel disgust (Haidt & Björklund, 2008). For example, repugnant smells make us more morally condemning (Schnall et al., 2008) while hand-washing make negative evaluations less severe (Schnall, Benton & Harvey, 2008). Likewise, disgust-sensitivity as a trait predict more moralizing towards “harmless wrongdoings” (Inbar, et al. 2009; Haidt & Hersh, 2001). Lately, it has been suggested that our emotional personalities also relate to the direction of our moral attitudes (Greene, 2008; Horberg, et al., 2009). The idea is that disgust make our evolved moral intuitions prevalent, and that these intuitions often are in conflict with consequentialistic cost-benefit thinking. The current study aims to investigate this.

Method

236 (88 male, 148 female) Japanese college-students read nine moral dilemmas written to measure three different moral aspects where moral intuitions and consequentialistic ethics traditionally conflict (Greene, 2008).

- Breaking absolute moral rules in order to improve global consequences (kill one to save five)
- Disrespecting absolute loyalty towards kin (parents helping strangers in greater need instead of helping own children)
- Retributive punishment (punishment in order to make the criminal “suffer for his sins”)

After each vignette, participants rated which of two possible endings they believed to be morally preferable. One ending was supposed to be in line with moral intuitions and the other in line with consequentialistic ethics. Participants then rated themselves on several personality-measures including need for cognition, faith in intuition, anger-proneness and disgust-sensitivity towards death and body envelope violations.

Results

While the other personality-variables were unrelated to moral attitudes, disgust-sensitivity negatively correlated with consequentialistic thinking in all three categories. Disgust-sensitive students were:

- Less likely to approve of breaking rules in order to improve global consequences ($r = -.194, p < .01$).
- More positive towards absolute loyalty towards kin ($r = -.173, p < .01$).
- More positive towards retributive punishments ($r = -.283, p < .001$).

The same results were obtained using MRA.

Discussion

Although the results are correlational in nature, all three correlations are significant and point in the expected direction. Future studies should test the relation between disgust and consequentialistic moral attitudes experimentally.

References

