Seminar 2 (Social Intuitionism)

Philosophy 535. 2nd Seminar: Social Intuitionism

A. Moral philosophy background

1. Historical attempts to explain the content of morality
   a) Self-interest and moral conventions or understanding (Mandeville, Hobbes)
   b) Sympathy and utility (Francis Hutcheson)
   c) Combined theories
      i) Hume
         a) Self-interest a strong motive: so a strong motive to follow local conventions
         b) Sympathy or empathy a weak motive but may lead to approval of local arrangements
      ii) Smith
         a) Sympathy is not just empathy
         b) It involves a sense of what's appropriate that is influenced by (but not determined by) local conventions
   d) Pure reason (Kant)

2. Distinguish actual (but implicit) conventions (Hobbes, Hume) from hypothetical contract theory (Rawls, Gauthier, Scanlon?)

3. Moral relativism: compare with relativism of position, movement, or mass
   a) Plausible as theories of what is the case
   b) Implausible as theories about what (all) people ordinarily think or what they (all) mean

4. Which is more basic, agent or spectator?
   a) Agent theories explain moral judgments about others in part by simulating their decisions
   b) Spectator theories explain moral decisions as designed to avoid others' disapproval and to receive others' approval

5. Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan
   a) There are stages of moral development in children as is revealed in the reasoning they produce in assessing moral dilemmas (e.g. Heinz's wife is seriously ill and needs a certain medicine only available at a particular drug store; but Heinz cannot afford to buy the medicine; should he steal it from the drug store?)
   b) Kohlberg's stages
      i) Do what your parents tell you to do
      ii) Be the sort of person your parents want you to be
      iii) Follow social rules
      iv) Be the sort of person socially approved
      v) The rules and virtues can be assessed in terms of general welfare
      vi) The rules and virtues can be assessed in terms of considerations of justice
   c) Gilligan's variant
      i) Kohlberg's stages are male oriented, reflecting a morality of rules and principles
      ii) Women tend to accept a morality of concern
   d) Later research: It is not established that men and women differ. Men like women have a morality of concern as well as a morality of rules and principles.
   e) Worry: maybe the evidence shows something about the development of linguistic rather than moral competence?

B. Haidt and Bjorkland's Social Intuitionism

1. Basic principles
   a) "Moral judgment is a product of quick and automatic intuitions that then give rise to slow, conscious moral reasoning."
   b) "Moral beliefs and motivations come from a small set of intuitions that evolution has prepared the mind to develop" (emphasis added).
   c) What exactly is a moral intuition, according to Haidt and Bjorkland?
      i) An "evaluative feeling (like-dislike, good-bad) about the character or actions of a person"?
      ii) Not an evaluation. That's the resulting judgment.

2. Negative moral reactions to cases where no harm is involved
   a) Examples:
      i) Eating one's dead pet dog
      ii) Masturbating with a dead chicken
      iii) Consensual protected sex between brother and sister

3. Five sources of morality--innate readiness to develop
   a) Concern for others
   b) Sense of fairness
   c) Respect for authority
   d) In group loyalty
   e) Avoidance of contamination

4. What is reasoning?
   a) Distinguish reasoning with others from a reasoning process that leads to changes in one's beliefs and intentions
   b) Can there be unconscious reasoning?
      i) Lashley: "No activity of mind is ever conscious."
      ii) The quote from Kahneman on page 189 "... consciousness is at the level of a choice that has already been made."
   c) Bargh and other psychogists think that most of one's goals are unconscious
   d) Does reasoning have to have steps? (What about the adjustments involved in attempting to reach reflective equilibrium?)
   e) Is conscious verbal reasoning a command center, or a press secretary?
C. Questions
   1. How might H&B distinguish between a moral intuition and an aesthetic intuition?
   2. The theory explicitly applies to moral judgments of others. Can it be extended to apply to moral decision making?