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Unsentimental ethics: Towards a content-specific account of the moral-conventional distinction

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Abstract

In this paper, we offer an overview and a critique of the existing theories of the moral-conventional distinction, with emphasis on Nichols's [Nichols, S. (2002). Norms with feeling: Towards a psychological account of moral judgment. *Cognition*, 84, 221-236] neo-sentimentalist approach. After discussing some distinctive features of Nichols's (2002) thesis and situating it within the context of his predecessors' work [Blair, R. (1995). A cognitive developmental approach to morality: Investigating the psychopath. *Cognition*, 57, 1-29; Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], we review a number of arguments and findings within the developmental literature that, collectively, pose a serious challenge to the proposition that emotion is indispensable for or plays a substantial contributory role in the

that emotion is indispensable for or plays a substantial contributory role in the construction of the moral domain. Furthermore, we report two studies whose results contravene those of Nichols's (2002) Experiments 1 and 2 (the empirical basis for his "norms with feelings" hypothesis), while favoring a version of Turiel's (1983) harm-based approach instead.



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Keywords

Morality; Convention; Affect; Harm; Disgust

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