



Reason, Moral Feeling and Psychopathy: A Kantian account.

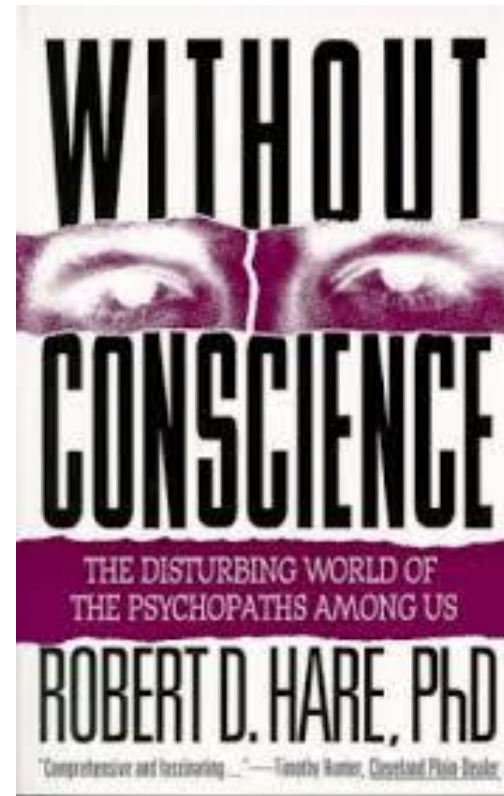
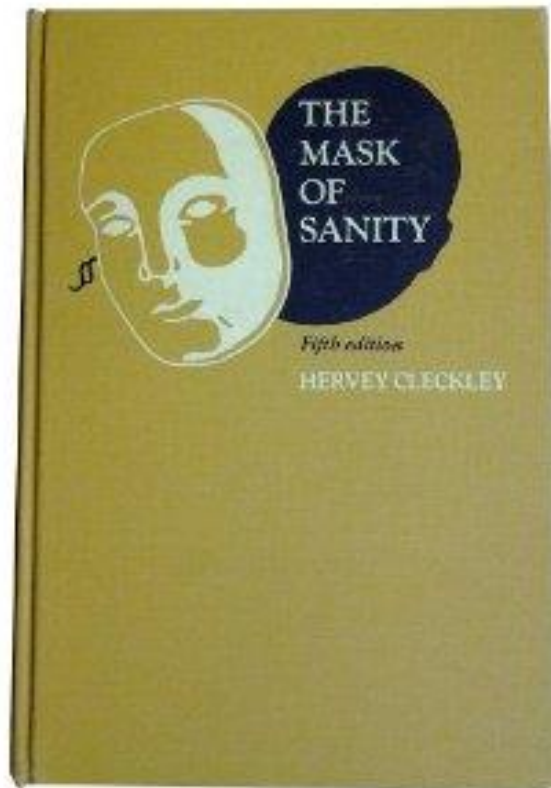
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Moral motivation: Three views

- Externalism: moral judgments and moral motivation *dissociate*. They are only contingently connected.
- Sentimentalism: moral motivation and moral judgment have the same foundation in *feelings* – notably empathy but other foundations have been suggested; disgust, anger. That's why they are motivating
- Rationalism: moral judgments concern what we have *reason* to do. So *insofar as we are rational*, we will do what we think we ought

The problem of the psychopath



The psychopathy checklist PCL(R)

- **Interpersonal Facet of Factor 1**

1. Glibness and superficial charm
2. Grandiose sense of self-worth
4. Pathological lying
5. Conning manipulative

- **Affective Facet 2 of Factor 1**

6. Lack of remorse or guilt
7. Shallow affect
8. Callous/Lack of empathy
- 16 Failure to accept responsibility

- **Non-loading items**

11. Promiscuous sexual behaviour
17. Many marital relationships
20. Criminal versatility

- **Lifestyle Facet 3 of Factor 2**

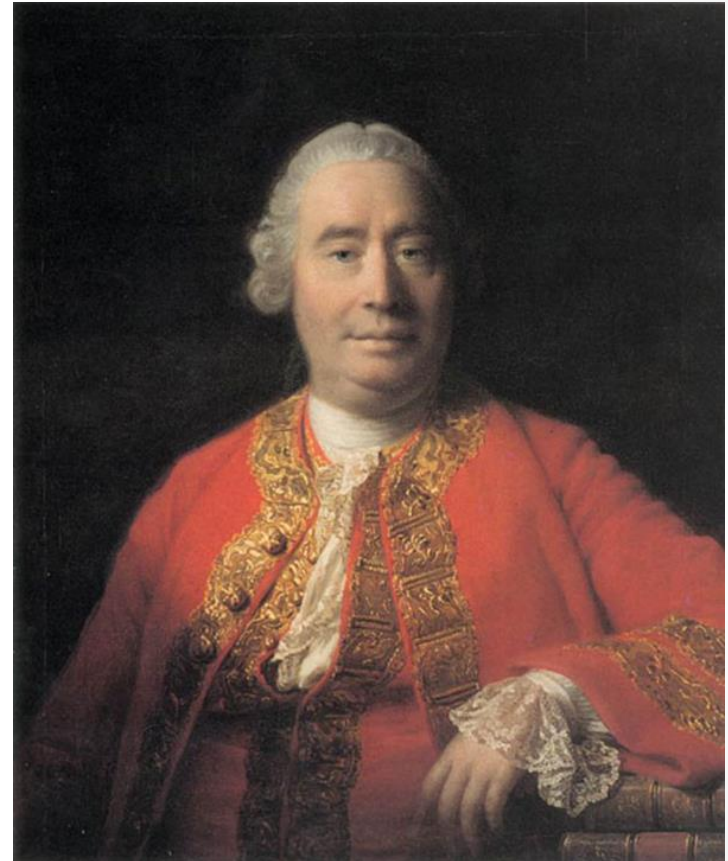
3. Need stimulation/prone to boredom
9. Parasitic lifestyle
- 13 Lack of realistic long term goals
14. Impulsivity
15. Irresponsibility

- **Antisocial Facet 4 of Factor 2**

10. Poor behavioural controls
12. Early behaviour problems
18. Juvenile delinquency
19. Revocation of conditional release

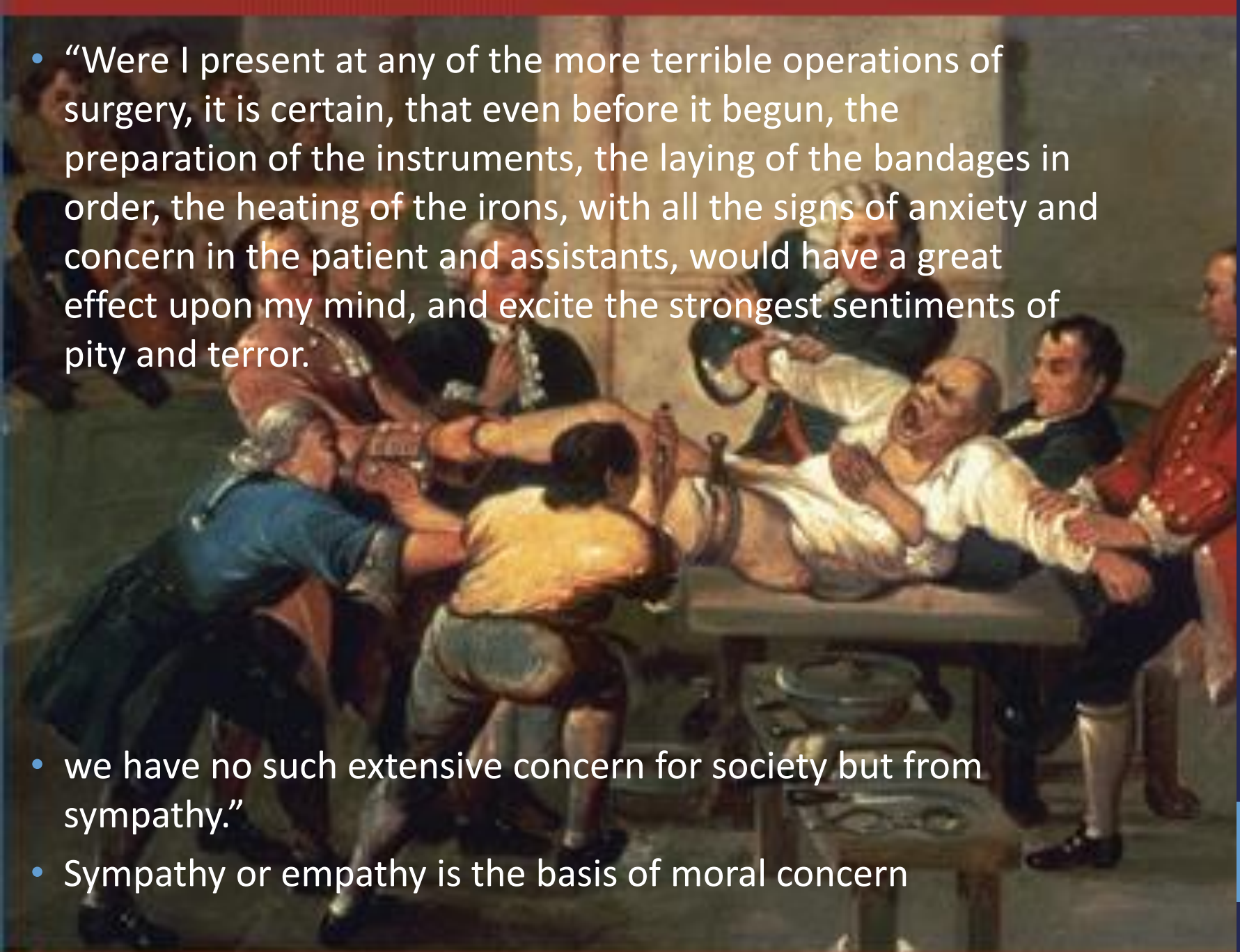
Hume's sentimentalism

- “Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular”



- “Were I present at any of the more terrible operations of surgery, it is certain, that even before it begun, the preparation of the instruments, the laying of the bandages in order, the heating of the irons, with all the signs of anxiety and concern in the patient and assistants, would have a great effect upon my mind, and excite the strongest sentiments of pity and terror.

- we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy.”
- Sympathy or empathy is the basis of moral concern



Kant's motive of duty



- Action done from sympathy “however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth...for the maxim lacks moral content, namely, that of doing such actions not from inclination *but from duty*”
- “An action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination”

What is acting from duty?

- The dutiful person helps because she sees helping as *required*.
- She takes the maxim or principle (help others in need) to express or embody a requirement – just as a law does.
- She understands that the requirement to help doesn't depend on her contingent feelings of sympathy
- But there is a problem!

The philosopher's stone



- “Moral feeling is the capacity to be affected by a moral judgment. My understanding may judge that an action is morally good but it need not follow that I shall do that action which I judge to be morally good: from understanding to performance is still a far cry. If this judgment were to move me to do the deed, it would be moral feeling...The understanding obviously can judge, but to give to this judgment of the understanding a compelling force, to make it an incentive that can move the will to perform the action – this is the philosopher's stone”

(Kant: *Lectures on Ethics* trans Infield NY 1963,44-45)

I *ought* to be motivated in accordance with my principles regardless of how I'm currently feeling.

Moral motivation will often involve restraint and self-control – the antithesis of acting out of emotion.

What is doing the work then?

How is it that principles *could* motivate?

Connecting principles and feeling: A sentimentalist account.



- Empathy induction during early development Fusing rules with affect by a process of association/education/ classic conditioning gives them a *special status*
- *The theory is naturalist and empirically grounded.
- *Connection of moral feeling to moral rules is contingent.

An alternative to empathy: receptivity to duty

- Kant's solution: Moral beings are those who are *receptive* to duty and this receptivity lies on the side of *feeling*.
- It is: ... the *susceptibility* to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty....Since *any consciousness of obligation depends upon moral feeling to make us aware of the constraint present in the thought of duty*, there can be no duty to have moral feeling or to acquire it; instead every man (as a moral being) has it in him originally. (MM 400)

- Reason or duty can only motivate those who are innately receptive to it. (Not psychopaths?)
- This receptivity lies at the basis of morality. Without it, Kant says, “humanity would dissolve...into mere animality”.
- How can we understand it? What is the nature of moral feeling. It all seems a bit mysterious
- Naturalizing Kant.

Rules versus principles



- What's the difference?
- Rules can be imposed, principles must be chosen – relation to self
- Reflection
- Regulation of the self or they are not your principles

What must *we* be like to move from rule following to principles?



Mental time travel

- Two aspects;
- **Executive control:** voluntary attention to and control over past, future, and imagined scenarios involving myself
- **Autonoetic awareness:** responding to the representation as of being *myself*: Without this awareness my response to the experiences I remember or imagine would be third personal - like reviewing the experiences or possible plans of someone else...lacks the link to motivation



How does mental time travel underwrite the possibility of motivation by principles?

Required for the development of moral principles (not just moral rules)

Essential for planning, self-directedness, self-control. Future considerations can compete with present interests.

Provides structure, meaning

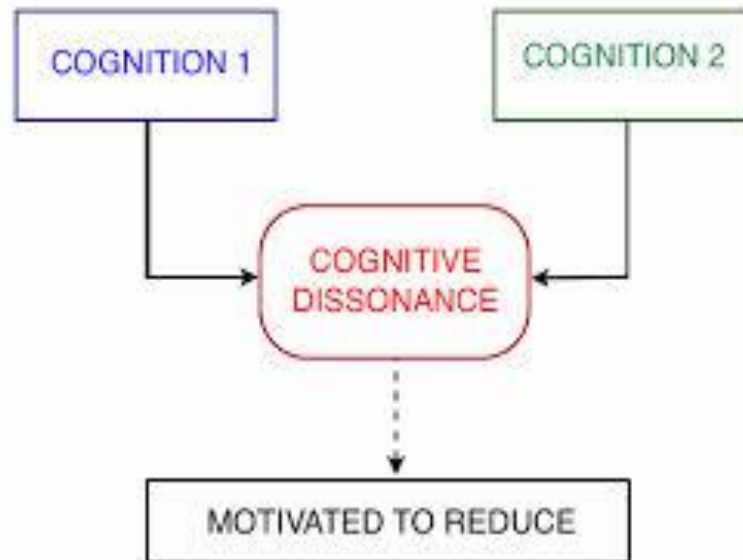
It enables us to see projected actions as consistent or inconsistent with *our* principles, plans and self-understanding.

According to Kant, this consistency or inconsistency is *motivating*.



A speculation: Kantian receptivity to reason and susceptibility to cognitive dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person perceives “non-fitting relations” or inconsistencies among their cognitions.



- Dissonance is unpleasant and this Festinger argues “is a motivating factor in its own right” (1964:3)

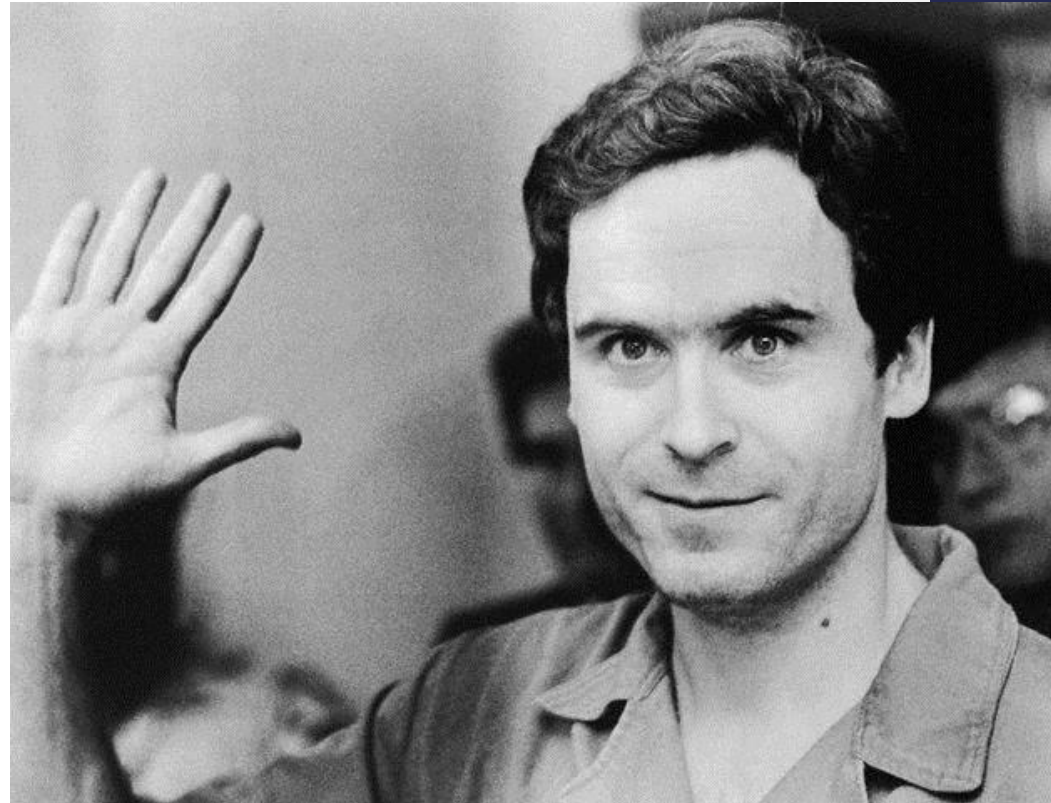
- The theory predicts that people will be motivated to reduce dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs or behaviours to bring them into line with each other.
- Cognitive dissonance often leads to highly *irrational* behaviour - deny the evidence if the personal cost is too high!
- However the drive for consonance could only be experienced by beings with certain rational capacities.
 - *Coherence constraint and rationality (Smith)
 - *Incoherence and incomprehensibility (FP project)

Dissonance and diachronic agency

- If we don't notice or don't care when an action would violate our stated principles, spoil our plans, or undermine our commitments then we don't have plans, principles or commitments. Without the sting of discrepancy we lose an important motivation for self-control.
- If we are not bound by any coherent principles, plans, or commitments we are not diachronic *agents* and so we won't meet the threshold for moral agency.
- *What would that be like?*

Psychopaths?

- The clinical literature on psychopaths suggests that they are untroubled by cognitive dissonance.
- E.g., Robert Hare (1993) points out that the speech of psychopathic individuals is erratic, inconsistent, and contradictory. “Mental scrabble without an overall script’
- Obvious failures of connection and continuity – like a bad movie



Look mum no dissonance!

- “I’m crazy about my mother. She and I are very close to each other”
- He estimated his love for his mother as deep and genuine...a feeling not less strong than the maximum a person can experience.

A few minutes later

- “Oh Mrs Blank is a wonderful person. She and I get on perfectly... I love Mrs Blank better than anyone

Do you love her better than your mother?

“Yes”, ... “I love Mrs Blank a great deal more than I do Mother.” (Cleckley p.119)



- “My mother is a great person, but I worry about her. She works too hard. I really care for that woman, and I’m going to make it easier for her.”

When asked about the money he had stolen from her

“I’ve still got some of it stashed away, and when I get out it’s party time!” (Hare 138)

The checklist again: Failure of empathy or insensitivity to dissonance?

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Shallow affect

- Both lack of empathy and lack of sensitivity to dissonance are required to explain the psychopath's amorality.
- But the two might be closely connected.
- Marked insensitivity to practical dissonance must impair the capacity to feel the moral emotions of regret, shame, and sympathy.
- The proper experience and expression of these emotions seems to require *a certain kind of agent*. Past actions must be identified as yours and obvious inconsistencies or contradictions between principles and actions have to be noticed and *unpleasant*.

Pathological lying



- “I wouldn’t exactly say she’s like a hypocrite...When she’s caught and confronted with her lies and other misbehaviour she doesn’t seem to appreciate the inconsistency of her position. Her conscience seems still untouched” (Roberta’s father cited in Cleckley p.72)
- The discomfort of cognitive dissonance acts as a kind of *coherence constraint*.


Lack of realistic long term goals

- Pete: Wants to be a vestryman
 - Is not very interested in religion and can't see the point of 'making a commotion about it'
 - Believes 'absolutely and completely every word of the Bible'



- It seemed, with due respect to the difficulties of putting such matters into words, rather a case of there being nowhere within him any valid contrast between *believing* and *not believing* or even between a thing of this sort being *so* or *not so*. (Cleckley 118)

Dissonance and Diachronic agency

- “He does not seem to feel the need to revise his attitude as the ordinary man does on finding himself in error. The fact that he had been, as he admitted by himself, on the wrong track seemed in no way to stimulate him toward getting on another track....*It was not hard to get the feeling that he had never been on any track at all, that he had not really been committed to his first proposition and so he had nothing to withdraw.*”
- **No pressure towards coherence**  **Diminished diachronic unity and sense of self?**

An explanation?



- Psychopaths “live strangely in time”. (McIlwain 2010). Can’t pick themselves out in the past or project themselves into a real future
- No core persisting sense of self, no stable point of view. Their attitude to themselves is oddly third personal.
 - “Pete was not discovering real motives in himself but reaching at random for plausible or possible reasons that might have influenced some hypothetical person to do what he had done” (Cleckely)

Dissonance and conscience

- In order for conscience to be touched one must be sensitive to the ways in which one's behaviour diverges from a standard to which one holds.
- Motivation by principle requires at least this.
- The psychopath's wantonness leaves them immune to the normative force of moral judgments and moral principles by ensuring they suffer no discomfort when they act in ways contrary to such judgments. Indeed they can hardly notice it.

Where have we got to?

A Kantian account rationalist of moral feeling explains psychopathic moral indifference just as well as sentimentalist accounts

Susceptibility to cognitive dissonance might be an important factor in explaining motivation by principles (necessary but not sufficient).

Alternative to the focus on empathy as the source of moral motivation.

Is there a relation between them? Is concern for your future self a kind of intrapersonal empathy as some have suggested?

Is there something about an episodic psychological structure that inhibits the development of empathy, regret and other moral emotions?

Conclusion



- How must a person be constituted in order to be capable of Kantian moral motivation?
- We require an *agent*, capable of mental time travel, relatively unified across time to whom moral/evaluative judgments are attributed, and so with whom certain statements or actions can be *consistent* or *inconsistent*.
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- Those who succeed in so unifying themselves must be *sensitive* to inconsistency between their principles and between principles and action. They must be cued *at the level of feeling*
- Cognitive dissonance is a promising candidate for this feeling
- Together these explain motivation in accordance with principles.