

Don't Think Twice: Automaticity and Moral Agency  
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ABSTRACT

In the past several decades, empirical research has reignited a heated debate about the psychological processes underlying good moral decision-making as well as moral agency broadly. Throughout much of the history in analytic moral philosophy and moral psychology, deliberation and awareness of one's motivating reasons have been perceived as both descriptively and normatively central to good moral decision-making and moral agency. However, recent research in psychology and cognitive science has shown that we explicitly deliberate about moral reasons much less often than is typically presumed. While many philosophers have been resistant to grapple with the theoretical and practical implications of this empirical research, an increasing number of theorists are recognizing the need to re-evaluate the descriptive and normative frameworks of moral philosophy and psychology. In particular, we are seeing a paradigm shift from more rationalistic views to frameworks that have roots in intuitionism and sentimentalism. In this book, I contribute to that paradigm shift in three ways. First, I review updated empirical research on automaticity and deliberation to show that automatic processes are more intelligent than is typically presumed and they serve our moral decisions well. Second, I draw from research in both humans and non-humans to show moral agency is anchored in empathetic, not rational, capacities. Finally, again drawing from empirical research, I argue that given the intelligence of automatic processing and the centrality of empathetic capacities in moral agency, we need new pedagogical frameworks for moral education and moral development. I put forth such a framework, according to which moral education focuses less on the explicit teaching of moral reasons and rules and more on skills such as empathetic perspective-taking and mindfulness.