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Moral Reasoning in Dogs

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Dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) differentiate between moral and immoral actors

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Introduction

- The origin of morality has been a topic of debate since at least the 15th century. The Hobbesian (1651) view argues that morality derives from culture, while the Rousseauvian (1763) view argues that morality is innate.
- This debate continues, but recent work supports the Rousseauvian innateness view, including:
- The universality of moral traits such as the tendency to do no harm (Foot, 1967)
- Evidence of moral behavior in preverbal infants (Hamlin, Wynn & Bloom, 2007, Hamlin, 2013)
- Evidence of moral behavior in animals such as rats, monkeys and elephants including prosocial behavior, avoiding causing harm to another, and accepting a small reward in return for giving another a large reward (Wechlin et al., 1964, Bartal, Decety & Mason, 2011, Lakshminarayanan & Santos, 2008)
- However, while we know animals exhibit 'moral' behaviors, do they have the same moral intuitions shared by humans?

The Present Study

- Domestic dogs have not been extensively tested for moral behavior, but seem capable of exhibiting these behaviors
- Dogs have superior social skills when interacting with their own or other species
- Domestic dogs can pick up social cues and perceive the goals of human actions (Marshall-Pescini, Ceretta & Prato-Previde, 2014; Stauch, et al, 2015)
- Therefore, we hypothesize that dogs will use moral-based influence when watching a neutral actor interact with a moral and immoral actor.
- To test this we replicated Hamlin & Wynn's (2011) with preverbal infants.

Method

- Subjects
 - Domestic dogs of all ages, multiple breeds, male and female
 - Recruited on a volunteer basis with owner's permission
- Subjects were tested at an on-site laboratory at IWU and at a nearby pet daycare in Bloomington, IL

Moral Actor



Immoral Actor



Results

If dogs prefer the moral actor to the immoral actor, they should look longer at the former.

- Though we do not yet have enough statistical power to detect differences (Immoral: n = 6; Moral: n = 11) preliminary analyses support this pattern



Discussion & Implications

- Preliminary data suggests that domestic dogs may discern between a moral and immoral actor
- These results provide support for the innate morality theory, and specifically the existence of moral intuition or behavior in non-human animals
- Further research is necessary to determine if domestic dogs are truly capable of morals, or solely moral behavior
- As continuing evidence for animal moral behavior is discovered, researchers must question whether morality is uniquely human and whether animals are more psychologically advanced than previously thought

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