



How to Talk Ethics to Neanderthals

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rational ethics

- Rational ideal: philosophers tell us that morality is a matter of sound reasoning
- Do we meet this ideal?

the trolley

- A runaway trolley is about to run over and kill five people, but you can throw a switch that will turn the trolley onto a side track, where it will kill only one person. Will you throw the switch?

the trolley II

- A runaway trolley is about to run over and kill five people, but you can shove a man in front of the train, saving the five people but killing the man. Will you push the man?

organ transplant

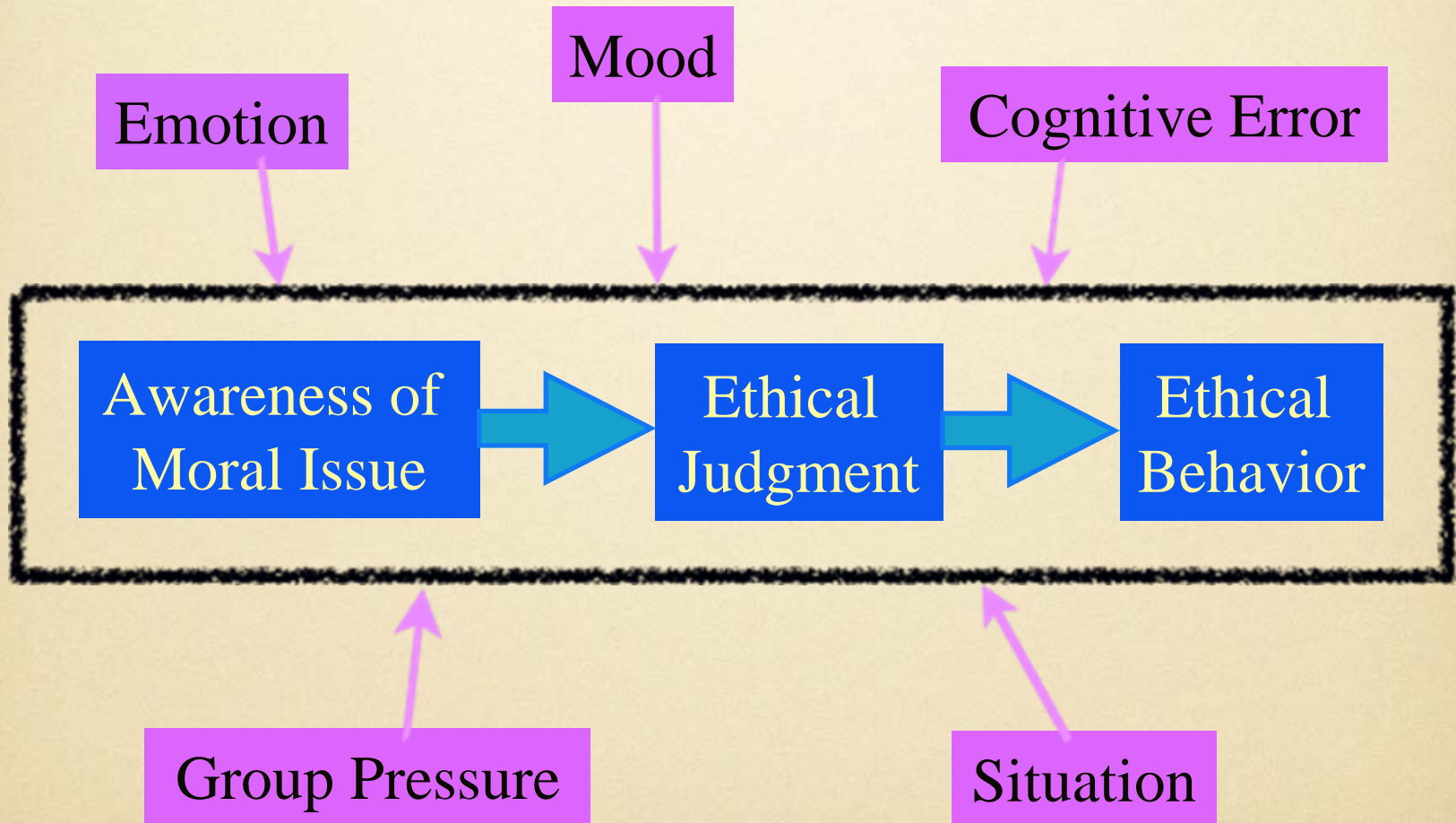
- Five patients are dying from organ failure, but a doctor can save all five if she cuts up a sixth healthy patient, removes his organs, and distributes them to the other five, killing one but saving five. Is it permissible to do this?

responses

YES

- throw the trolley switch 94%
- push the man 10%
- do the transplants 8%

rational ethics human ethics



impact of mood: dime study

	<u>helped</u>	<u>did not help</u>
found dime	14	2
did not find dime	1	24

(isen & levein, 1972)

impact of situation: good samaritan study

	degree of hurry		
	low	medium	high
percentage helping	63%	45%	10%

more ethical if

-just washed hands

- in a clean room

- smell baking bread or citrus scents

impact of cognitive errors: risk framing

A: There is a 20 percent chance that the chemicals in your company's plant might be causing ten cancer-related illnesses per year. Your company must decide whether to purchase a multimillion-dollar filtration system that would reduce this probability to a 10 percent chance.

B: There is a 10 percent chance that the chemicals in your company's plant that might be causing five cancer-related illnesses per year. Your company must decide whether to purchase a multimillion-dollar filtration system that would entirely eliminate this risk

impact of cognitive errors: risk framing

We are far more likely to address a risk we can eliminate
than one we can simply reduce

impact of cognitive errors: risk framing

- A large car manufacturer has recently been hit with a number of economic difficulties. It appears that it needs to close three plants and lay off 6,000 employees. The vice president of production, who has been exploring alternative ways to avoid the crisis, has developed two plans

alternatives

- **Plan A** will save one of the three plants and 2,000 jobs
- **Plan B** has a one-third probability of saving all three plants and all 6,000 jobs, but has a two-thirds probability of saving no plants and no jobs

alternatives

- **Plan C** will result in the loss of two of the three plants and 4,000 jobs
- **Plan D** has a two-thirds probability of resulting in the loss of all three plants and all 6,000 jobs, but has a one-third probability of losing no plants and no jobs

alternatives



- **Plan A** will save one of the three plants and 2,000 jobs
- **Plan B** has a one-third probability of saving all three plants and all 6,000 jobs, but has a two-thirds probability of saving no plants and no jobs
- **Plan C** will result in the loss of two of the three plants and 4,000 jobs



- **Plan D** has a two-thirds probability of resulting in the loss of all three plants and all 6,000 jobs, but has a one-third probability of losing no plants and no jobs

impact of cognitive errors: risk framing

We become more risk-seeking when the risk is framed as a potential loss rather than as a potential gain

Tough questions

- How much of my judgment is emotion? What does it tell me?
- Would an objective observer make a different decision?
- Would I make a different decision if I was in a different mood?
- Am I feeling too rushed to make a good judgment?
- Have I framed the issue in terms of both gains and losses?
- How are social pressures shaping my judgment?
- Am I realistic about my potential for error?

why bother with rationality?

If people reflect on a moral issue before they are involved in it, they are more likely to behave in accordance with their consciences when that issue faces them in real life.

- Steven Sherman

the neanderthal challenge



- If people respond to ethical situations based on emotion, gut reaction, and situational dynamics, then...
 - emotion may get in the way of our ability to see issues clearly
 - we might fall prey to stereotypes and biases
 - others may respond defensively or emotionally when we talk about ethics

the neanderthal challenge

- **Type 1:** We (or others) fail to recognize that there is an ethical issue
- **Type 2:** We get stuck managing contests between two rights (or two wrongs)



type 1

- Parable of the Sadhu



contributing factors



How would you have persuaded Mr. McCoy?



methods of dissent



Direct Dissent:

“This is wrong!! I won’t do it!!”

Indirect Dissent:

“I’m feeling a little uncomfortable about this. I wonder if there’s a better approach?”

Appeals for Information:

“I’m a bit confused. Can you help me understand why we need to do this?”

Invoke Institutional Values:

“How will this reflect on our commitment to _____?”

Suggest a Creative Alternative:

Creatively transcend the “tyranny of the either/or”



how do you learn to play the lion?

How to get good at dissenting:

- 1) Practice disagreeing with people you know well about things that don't really matter
- 2) Practice disagreeing with people you know well about things that do matter
- 3) Practice disagreeing with people you don't know well about things that don't really matter
- 4) Practice disagreeing with people you don't know well about things that do matter.

- Prof. Joshua Margolis, Harvard Business School

using moral language

- moral language...
 - captures people's attention
 - discourages disagreement
 - creates a halo
 - so what's the bad news?

a mini-case

a manager:

“Six months ago we announced plans to establish an on-site day care center. We felt like this was the right thing to do—in fact I remember saying to a large group of employees, ‘We believe that companies have an obligation to help their employees, especially single parents, reduce the tension between work and family demands.’”

the fallout

“Boy, was I surprised by the flak. In my 30 years in HR I have never seen such a hostile reaction to a change of plans. The criticism was both harsh and personal. Employees made sweeping claims like, ‘I’ve worked here since college but now I’m starting to wonder if our leaders can be trusted,’ and, ‘If you break your promise in this area, what lies will you tell us next time?’ ... I guess we just underestimated how sensitive people are about the well-being of their kids.”

perils of moral language

- moral language...
 - gets issues on the agenda, but then leaves them unmanageable
 - limits opportunity for compromise, negotiation
 - may set the bar too high (“if you lead rhetorically with your principles, inevitably you look like a hypocrite”)
 - creates defensiveness, counter-moralization

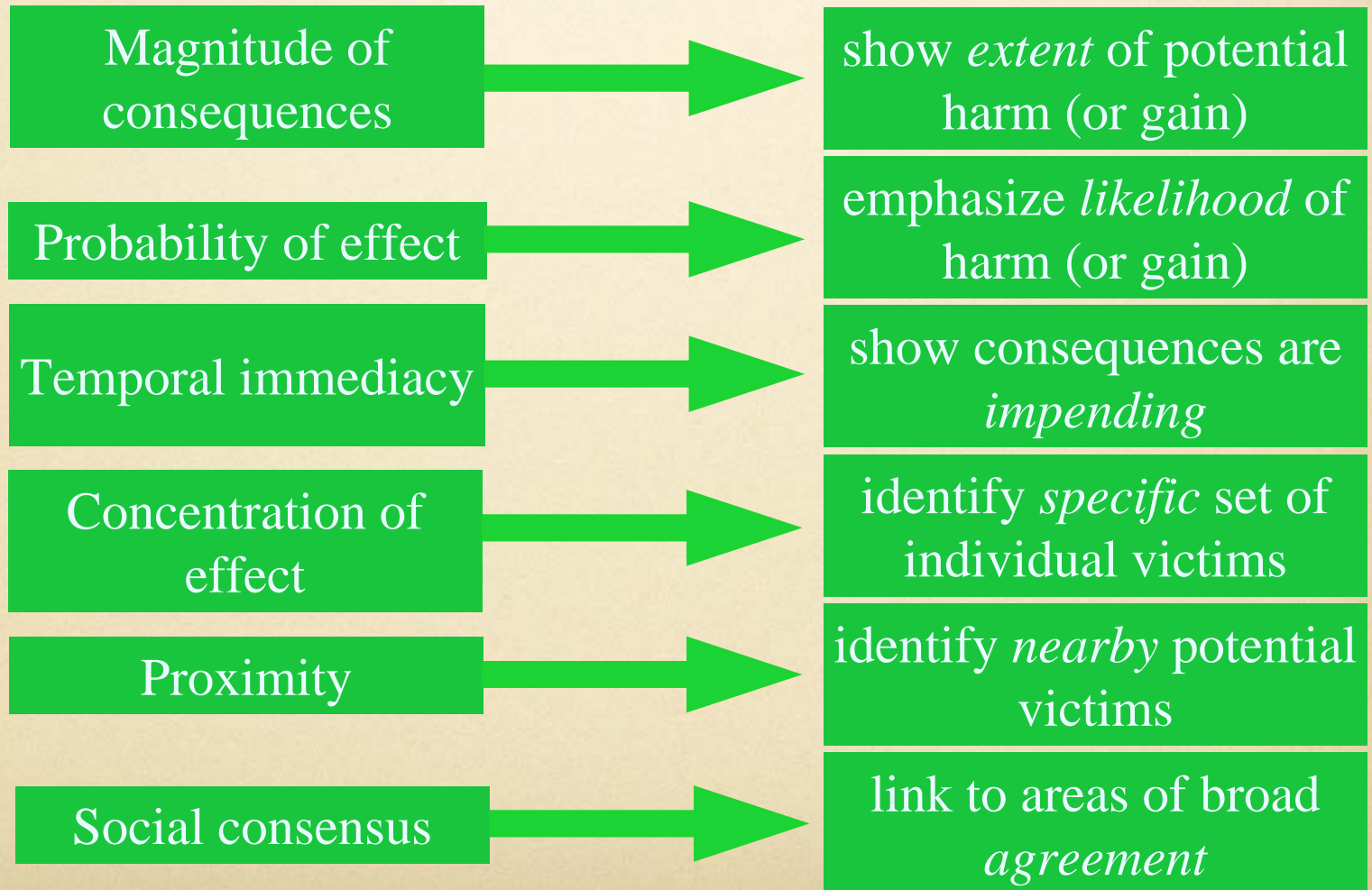
an alternative to moralizing

- ...manage “moral intensity”

(likelihood that an issue will be naturally be
viewed as a moral one)

In other words, frame the issue so people *have* to
consider ethical implications

what makes an issue morally intense?



what about type 2?

(stuck between two rights)

- caring for the unchosen:
 - make your rationale transparent
 - express the agony
 - temporize the decision
 - legitimate the unchosen at the next possible opportunity
 - and/or devote resources to the unchosen in another context

What makes an idea “true” (small t) in your organization??

- it has “cash value” for the organization
- it can be grafted onto other ideas that the organization holds as true
- it is down-to-earth, easily communicated