

## **Three problems for a theory of universal moral grammar**

Raffaele Caterina

I see three problems for a theory of universal moral grammar, as proposed in Hauser, *Moral Minds: The Nature of Right and Wrong*, 2006.

- 1) Why should we imagine that the human mind is equipped with a moral organ, a universal moral grammar?

According to evolutionary psychology the human minds consist of a large number of circuits that are *functionally specialized*. We have all these specialized neural circuits because the same mechanism is rarely capable of solving different adaptive problems. The human minds are sophisticated computers, whose circuits are elegantly designed to solve the kinds of problems our ancestors routinely faced. How can we reconcile this with the idea of a universal moral grammar? What kind of problems in the life of our ancestors justified the development of a general organ for moral sense? Why shouldn't we rather imagine that our minds comprises several different neural circuits specialized for guiding our moral judgment and behaviour in specific fields (reciprocity, sexual behaviour, etc.)?

- 2) How we can explain that human beings quite naturally develop a repertoire of different codes of social conduct?

Law, morals, manners, religion obviously employ (at least in part) the same cognitive machinery; yet they often give different answers to the same questions. This is not necessarily irreconcilable with the existence of a universal moral grammar, still it is something which requires an explanation.

- 3) Implicit knowledge is not necessarily innate

The advocates of universal moral grammar often emphasize the fact that “when we judge an action as morally right or wrong, we do so instinctively, tapping a system of unconsciously operative and inaccessible moral knowledge” (Hauser 2006, p. 456). The fact that we have a system of unconsciously operative moral knowledge does not necessarily mean that it is hardwired in our brain. This is evident in light of the literature on implicit learning.