



Ethics and Society

POLI 27

Week 1 Review

- ▶ We started with an introduction to **moral reasoning** and **ethical theories**.
- ▶ We saw that there are at least **four groups** of ethical theories (Tavani).
- ▶ We looked at some **examples** of these ethical theories:
 - ▶ Bentham (consequentialist)
 - ▶ Kant (deontological)
 - ▶ Smith (virtue)
- ▶ We examined how each of these moral theories is an attempt to make sense of our **moral intuitions**.
- ▶ Then we looked at the role that morality is playing in **evolutionary** terms (Tomasello and Vaish), especially in fostering the creation of **in-groups** and **out-groups** (Böhm et al.).

Looking Forward

- ▶ Today, we'll wrap up our discussion of ethical theories and evolutionary origins.
- ▶ On Wednesday, we're going to discuss **moral intuitions** and the role they play in grounding our ethical theories.
- ▶ The **midterm essay** will go live on Thursday morning, and you'll have until Wednesday 8/18 at 11:59pm to complete it.
- ▶ Next week, we'll study what happens in cases of **too much or too little morality**.
- ▶ Then we'll look at **political ideologies**, and how they relate to the ethical theories we've been discussing. We'll also study the problem of **government** more broadly.
 - ▶ This will require us to discuss **norms** (legal, social and moral), and how **norm change** works.
- ▶ We'll finish the course with two **case studies** of ethics *in* society: one on **effective altruism**, and another on **toleration**.
- ▶ The **final essay** will go live on 8/28, and you'll have until Friday 9/3 at 11:59pm to complete it.

Reading for Monday 8/9

- ▶ Mengzi - Selections
- ▶ John Rawls - A Theory of Justice (selections)
- ▶ Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)
- ▶ Game: The Evolution of Trust

Mengzi - Selections

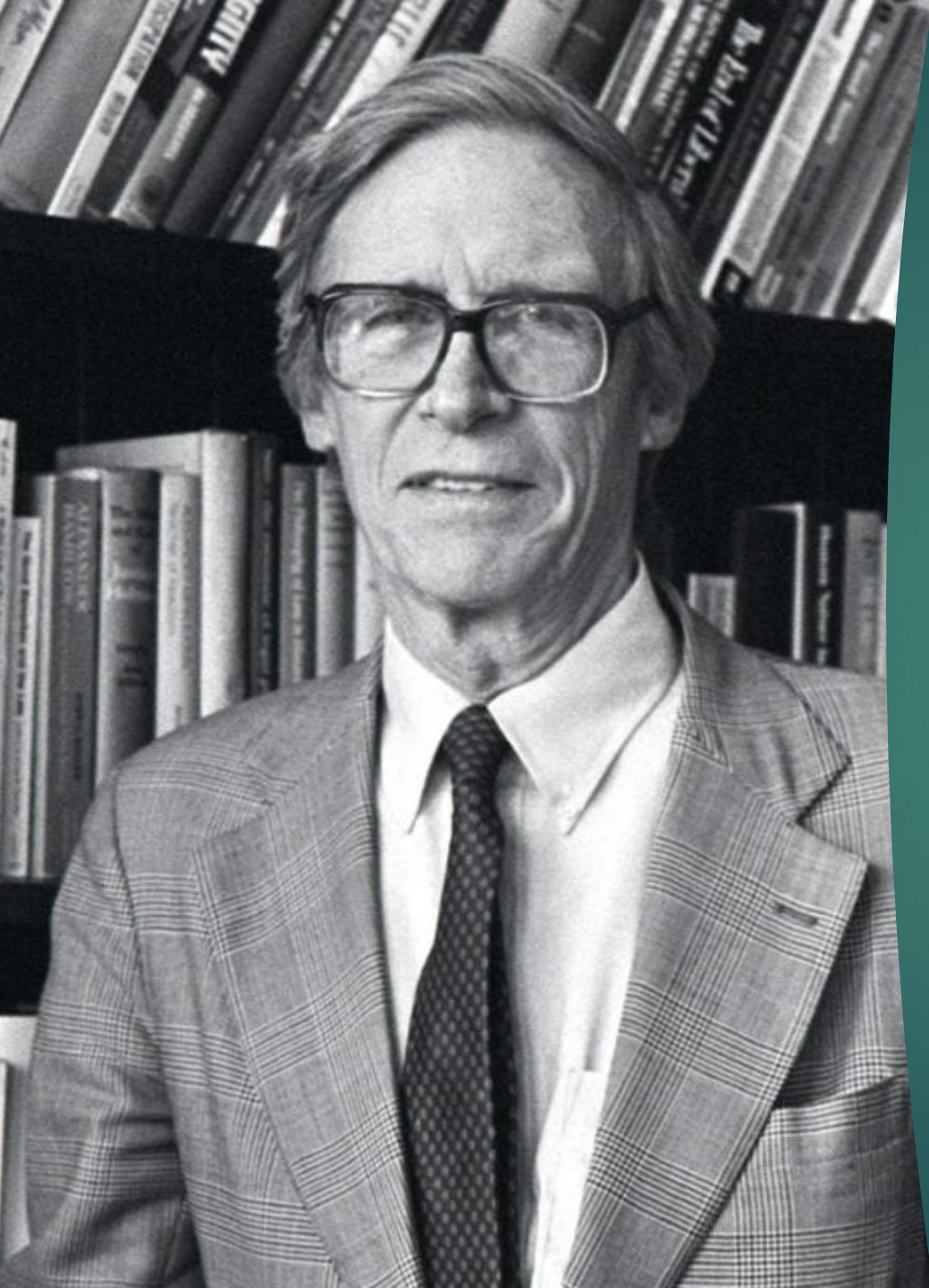
- ▶ Mengzi (Mencius): c. 372-300 BCE.
- ▶ Fourth generation after Kongzi (Confucius).
- ▶ Human beings naturally tend towards virtuous behavior.
 - ▶ Human beings have a “nature,” just like the willow tree.
 - ▶ **“Man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward” (6A:2).**
 - ▶ **“The feeling of commiseration is found in all men; the feeling of shame and dislike is found in all men; the feeling of respect and reverence is found in all men; and the feeling of right and wrong is found in all men” (6A:6).**



Mengzi - Selections

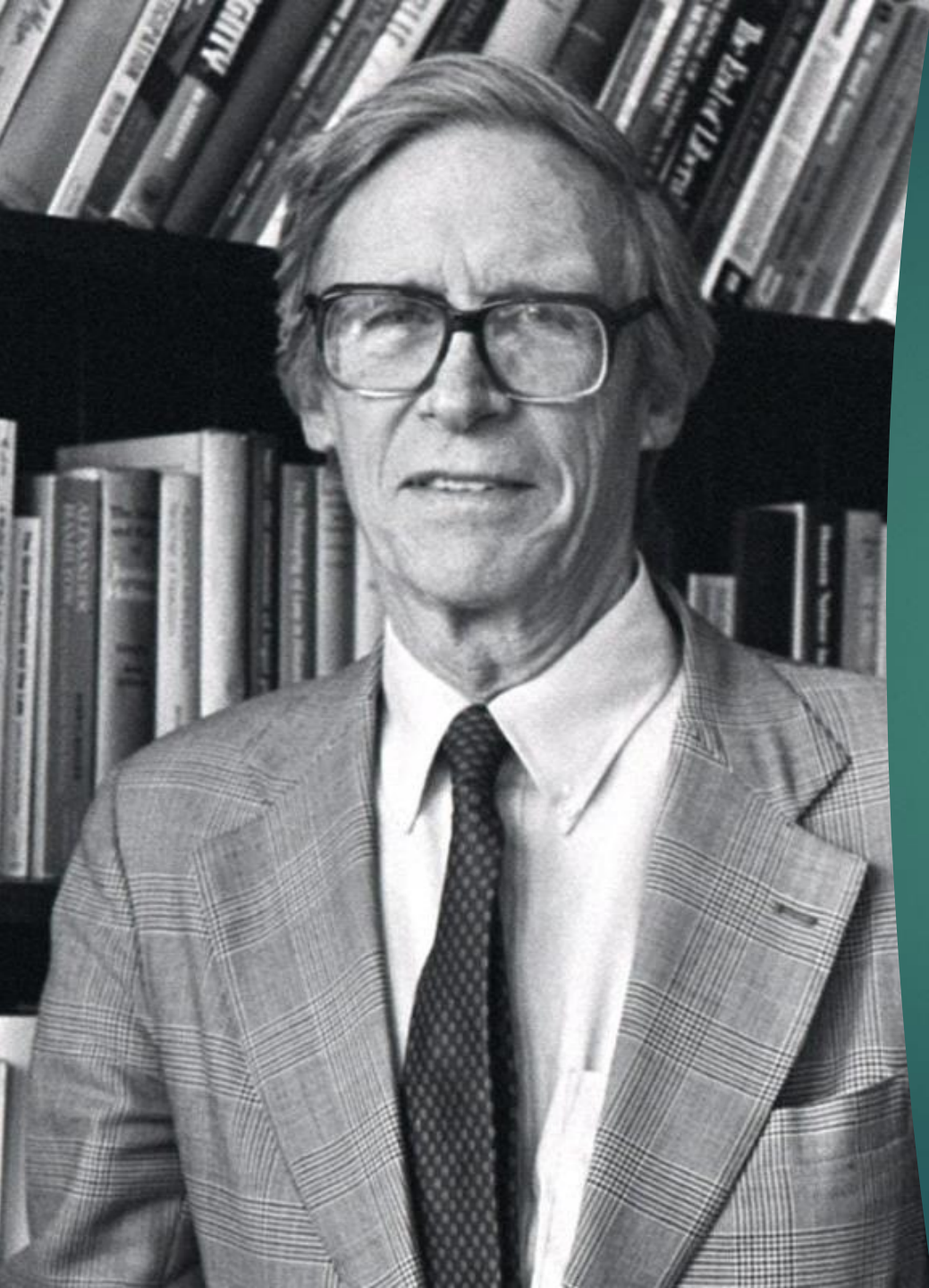
- ▶ Righteousness is **internal**, not external (6A:4).
 - ▶ “Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not drilled into us from outside. **We originally have them with us**” (6A:6).
- ▶ **Cultivate the “green shoots” (sprouts) of morality.** Generalize our behavior towards close friends and family to the whole world.
 - ▶ Mengzi is reacting to Mozi, who argued that we should strive for universal love (jen).
 - ▶ Instead, Mengzi argues that we begin with the “green shoots” (unlearned moral habits) and attempt to cultivate this into universal love.





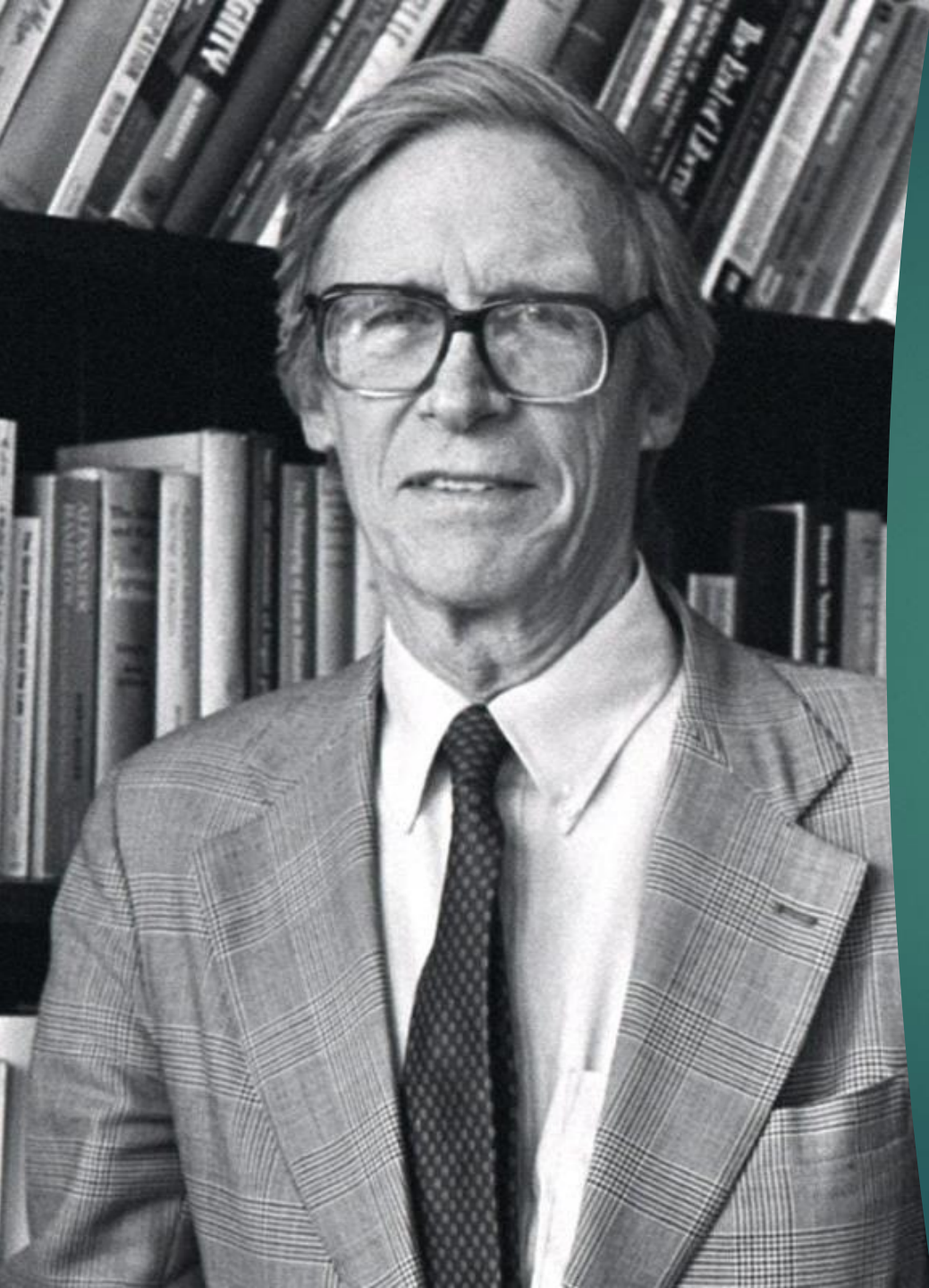
John Rawls - A Theory of Justice (selections)

- ▶ Rawls is trying to give a theory of justice based on the **social contract** principles.
- ▶ What should the contract encompass?
 - ▶ The form of government?
 - ▶ The type of society?
 - ▶ Rawls: no, **the principles of justice themselves.**
- ▶ What are these principles of justice?
 - ▶ Well, if this is a contract, people wouldn't get into it unless they thought it was going to benefit them.
 - ▶ So the principles must be **ones that "free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality"** (10).
- ▶ This is a thought experiment: purely hypothetical.



John Rawls - A Theory of Justice (selections)

- ▶ Justice as Fairness: “The original position is...the appropriate initial status quo, and thus the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair” (11).
 - ▶ “think of the parties in the initial situation as rational and mutually disinterested”
- ▶ We can use Justice as Fairness to evaluate our current social arrangements: “Our social situation is just if it is such that by this sequence of hypothetical agreements we would have contracted into the general system of rules which defines it”.
- ▶ “The general recognition of this fact would provide the basis for a public acceptance of the corresponding principles of justice” (12).
- ▶ “[O]nce the principles of justice are thought of as arising from an original agreement in a situation of equality, it is an open question whether the principle of utility would be acknowledged” (13).



John Rawls - A Theory of Justice (selections)

- ▶ “I shall maintain instead that the persons in the initial situation would choose two rather different principles: **the first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties**, while **the second holds that social and economic inequalities**, for example inequalities of wealth and authority, **are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society**” (13).
- ▶ “The intuitive idea is that since everyone’s well-being depends upon a scheme of cooperation without which no one could have a satisfactory life, the division of advantages should be such as to draw forth the **willing cooperation** of everyone taking part in it, including those less well situated” (13).

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ Getting the question right: the authors ask not why cooperation occurs at all, but why it occurs in contexts where self-interest isn't obviously implicated.
- ▶ “First, people cooperate not only for self-interested reasons but also because they are **genuinely concerned** about the well-being of others, try to uphold social norms, and **value behaving ethically for its own sake**” [proximate motivations for cooperation].
- ▶ “Second, we came to have these “moral sentiments” because our ancestors lived in environments, both natural and socially constructed, in which **groups of individuals who were predisposed to cooperate and uphold ethical norms tended to survive and expand relative to other groups**, thereby allowing these prosocial motivations to proliferate” [distant evolutionary origins of cooperation].

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ First answer: we have “social preferences” in favor of cooperation. We care what others think about us, and we want to uphold our group’s ethical norms.
- ▶ So people cooperate because we like to cooperate. Ok. Why do we like it?
 - ▶ The environment of our evolutionary prehistory may have required cooperative behavior (group hunting, cooperative breeding, etc.)
 - ▶ But even if there’s a need for cooperation to survive, the division of the *gains from cooperation* may be contentious. How to prevent people getting cheated?
- ▶ First, human groups have devised ways to protect their altruistic members from exploitation by the self-interested.
- ▶ Second, humans adopted prolonged and elaborate systems of socialization that led individuals to **internalize the norms** that induce cooperation, so that **contributing to common projects and punishing defectors became objectives in their own right rather than constraints on behavior**

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ Third, **between-group competition** for resources and survival was and remains a decisive force in human evolutionary dynamics.
- ▶ In short, humans became the cooperative species that we are because cooperation was highly beneficial to the members of groups that practiced it, and we were able to construct social institutions that minimized the disadvantages of those with social preferences in competition with fellow group members, while heightening the group-level advantages associated with the high levels of cooperation that these social preferences allowed.
- ▶ This is a uniquely human story.
 - ▶ One extreme: hymenoptera and other social insects (and mole rats).
 - ▶ Other extreme: solitary hunters (most large predators).

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ The human difference: developmental plasticity.
- ▶ “the human cognitive, linguistic and physical capacities...allow us to formulate general norms of social conduct, to erect social institutions regulating this conduct, to communicate these rules and what they entail in particular situations, **to alert others to their violation and to organize coalitions to punish the violators.**”
- ▶ “No less important is the psychological capacity to internalize norms, to experience such social emotions as shame and moral outrage, and to base group membership on such nonkin characteristics as ethnicity and language, which in turn facilitates costly conflicts among groups.”
- ▶ Important: cooperation isn't always good. “In some settings, competition, the antithesis of cooperation, is the more effective means to a given end.” Adam Smith's example: cooperation (price-fixing, cartels, etc.) undesirable, replaced by competition.

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ The mere desire to cooperate isn't enough:
 - ▶ Tragedy of the commons
 - ▶ Prisoners' dilemma
- ▶ Tension between self-interest and cooperation:
 - ▶ self-interest should normally dictate our behavior, but
 - ▶ cooperation is very common in the real world (Ostrom 1990).
- ▶ **Strong Reciprocity:** In experiments we commonly observe that people sacrifice their own payoffs in order to cooperate with others, to reward the cooperation of others, and to punish free-riding, even when they cannot expect to gain from acting this way. We call the preferences motivating this behavior **strong reciprocity**" [distinguished from ordinary reciprocity].

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

	<i>H</i>	<i>D</i>
<i>H</i>	$b - c, b - c$	$-c, b$
<i>D</i>	$b, -c$	$0, 0$

Figure 3.1. A Prisoner's Dilemma: Single-period payoff to help (*H*) and don't help (*D*). We assume $b > c > 0$. Helping contributes b to the other player at a cost of c to the contributor.

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

	Stag	Hare
Stag	4, 4	1, 3
Hare	3, 1	2, 2

Fig. 2: Stag hunt example

	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	2, 2	0, 3
Defect	3, 0	1, 1

Fig. 3: Prisoner's dilemma example

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

	Left	Right
Left	8, 8	0, 0
Right	0, 0	8, 8

Fig. 2 *Pure Coordination*

	Contribute	Defect
Contribute	8, 8	0, 0
Defect	0, 0	5, 5

Fig.3 *Assurance Game*

	Football	Shopping
Football	8, 5	0, 0
Shopping	0, 0	5, 8

Fig. 4 *Battle of the Sexes*

	Stag	Hare
Stag	8, 8	0, 7
Hare	7, 0	5, 5

Fig. 5 *Stag Hunt*

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

<i>Game</i>	<i>Page</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Ultimatum	p. 19	Güth et al. (1962), Henrich (2000)
Prisoner's dilemma	p. 20	Dawes(1980), Axelrod (1984)
Gift exchange	p. 21	Akerlof (1982), Fehr et al. (1993)
Public goods	p. 22	Yamagishi (1986), Ostrom et al. (1992)
Public goods with punishment	p. 24	Fehr and Gächter (2000a,2002)
Third-party punishment	p. 31	Fehr and Fishbacher (2004)
Dictator	p. 32	Kahneman et al. (1986), List (2007)
Trust	p. 36	Berg et al. (1995), Burks et al. (2003)

Table 3.1. Experimental games.

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ “These experiment show that when those predisposed to cooperate can associate preferentially with like-minded people, cooperation is not difficult to sustain.”
 - ▶ “When subjects could choose their partners, there was a strong tendency for subjects to play with others who approximately share their level of contribution.”
- ▶ “Altruistic punishment: when subjects are given a direct way of retaliating against free-riders rather than simply withholding their own cooperation, they use it in a way that helps sustain cooperation” [even without personal benefit].
- ▶ We have an intrinsic motivation to punish shirkers, but no equivalent motivation to contribute altruistically [this punishment is retributive, not instrumental].
 - ▶ “After the initial rounds in the standard public goods without punishment game, experimental subjects decline to contribute altruistically but once punishment is permitted they avidly engage in the altruistic activity of punishing low contributors.”

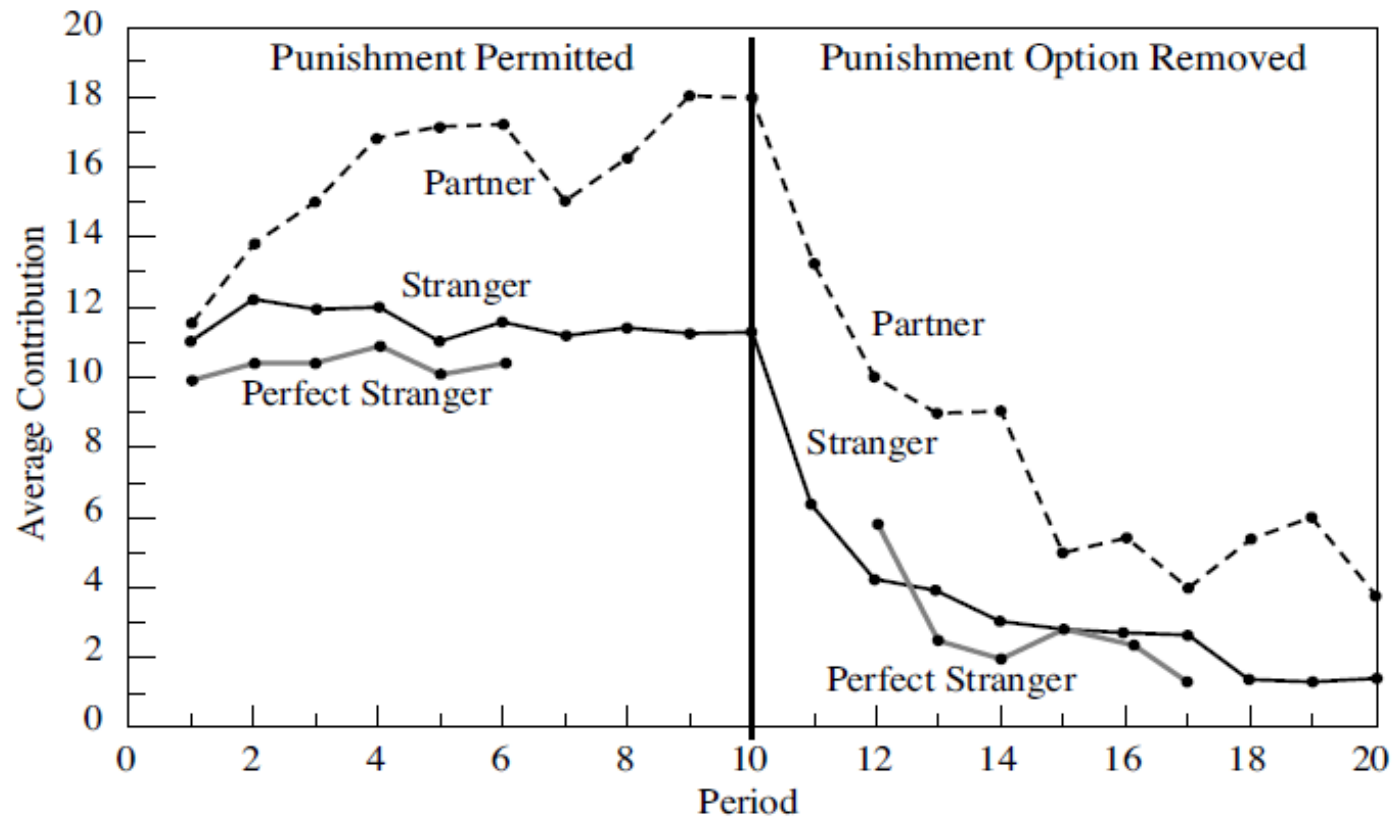
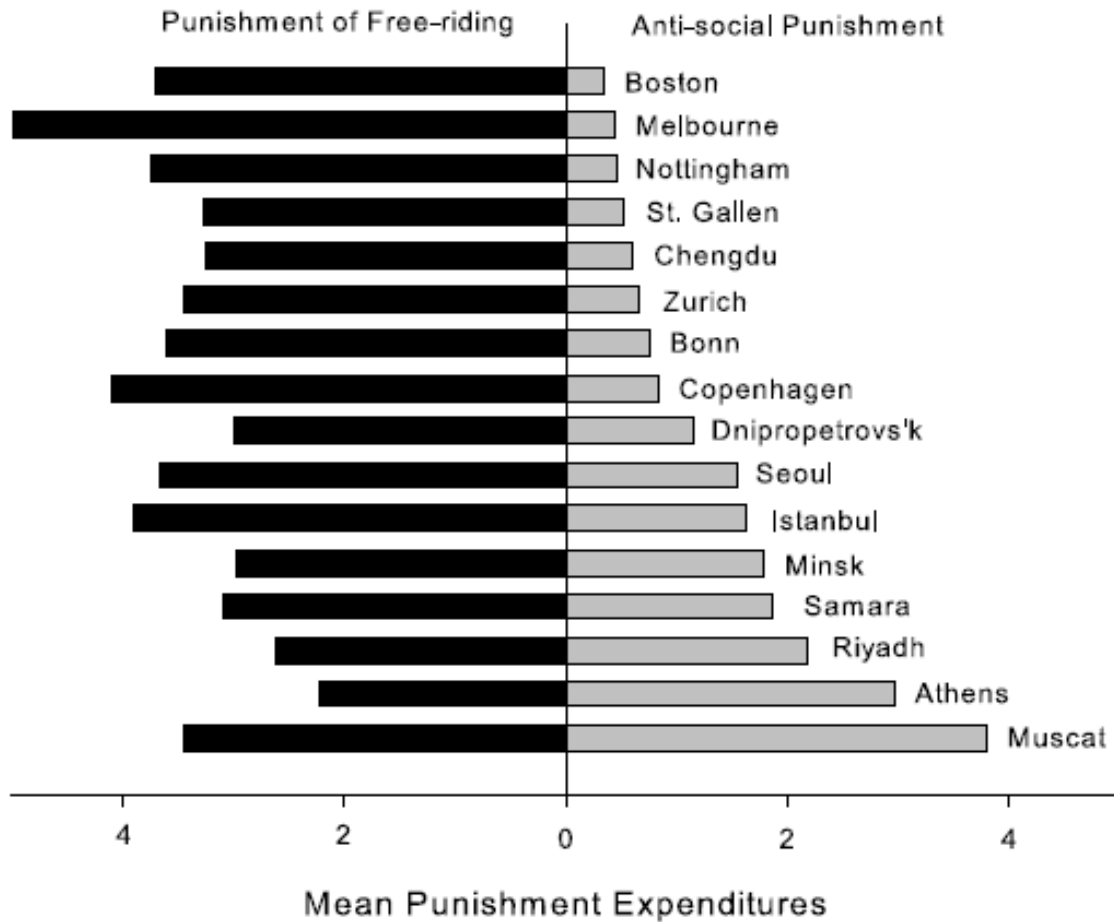


Figure 3.2. Public goods game with punishment, average contributions over time. Partner, Stranger, and Perfect Stranger treatments are shown when the punishment condition is played first (Fehr and Gächter 2000a). Results are similar when the punishment condition is played second.

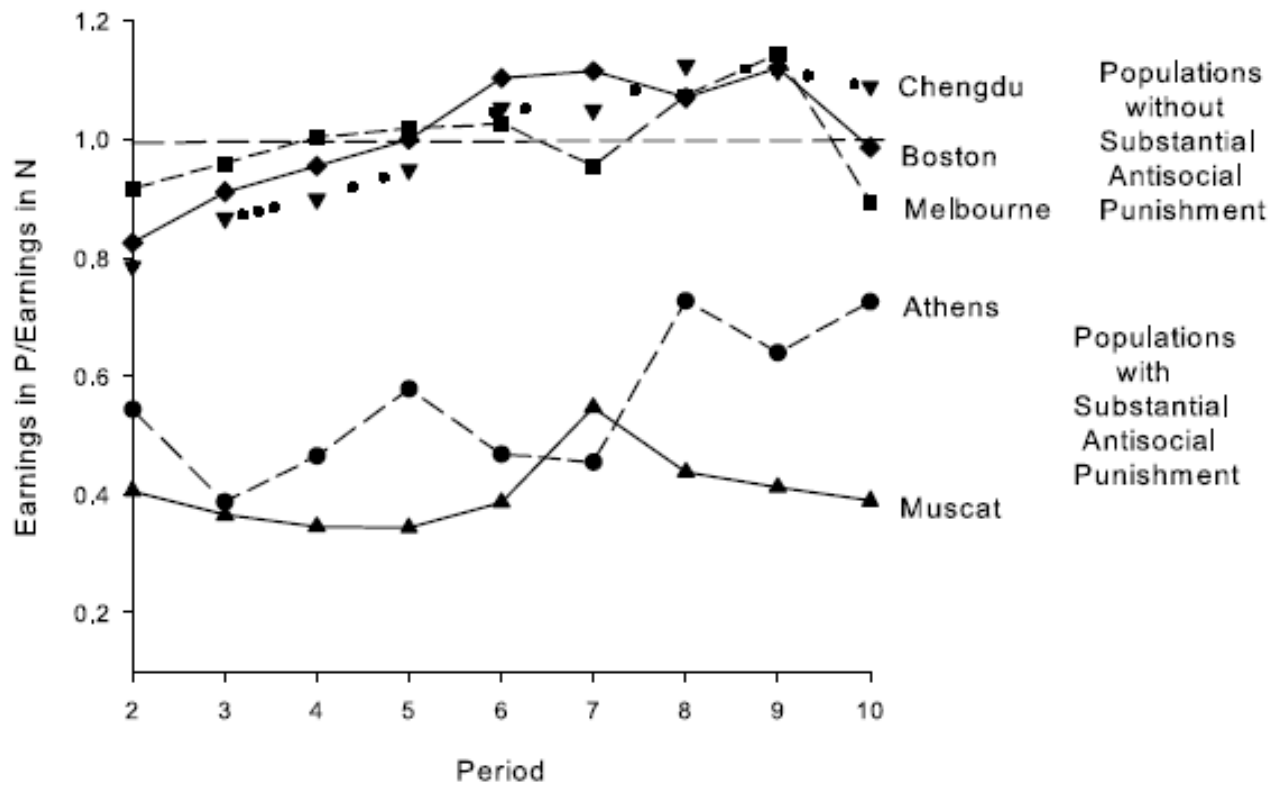
Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ The authors conclude that “agents enjoy punishment.”
- ▶ But sometimes the punishment gets out of hand, and impedes cooperation.
 - ▶ In some countries, experiments showed “vendetta-like retaliation against punishment” leading to costly arms-race dynamics of wasteful punishment expenditures. The authors call this “antisocial punishment.”
 - ▶ For example, “punishment of free-riders, even if they were strangers, was legitimate in Boston, Melbourne, and Chengdu but it was not in Muscat and Athens.”
 - ▶ The importance of punishment may be less about the actual impact of the punishment itself, and more about the “moral signal” conveyed by group consensus on punishment. Purely symbolic punishment is effective. Third parties observing symbolic punishment change their own behavior.



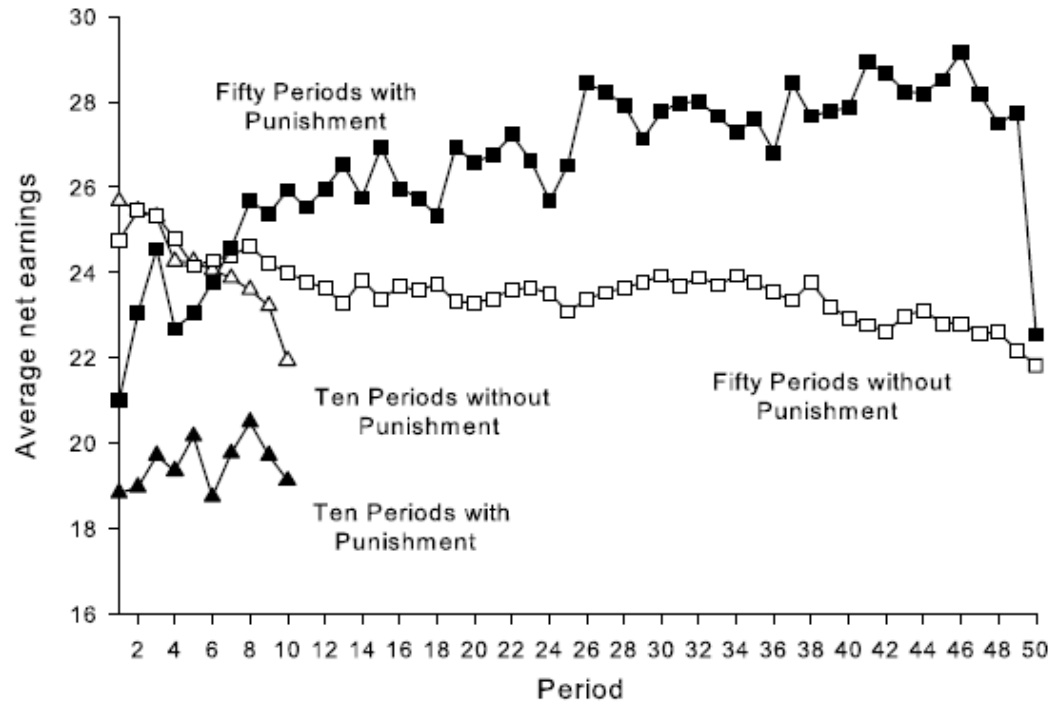
Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)



Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ Experimental subjects tend to punish those who hurt others, as long as the action causing the harm violates a social norm.
- ▶ Interestingly, even those individuals not motivated to punish will engage in third-party punishment (mimicking the type) if they believe that this will induce peers to behave fairly to them.
 - ▶ “Punishment is thus not simply retaliation in response to personal damages but appears to reflect more general ethical norms” (32).
- ▶ Many observers of experimental games have interpreted the fact that people sometimes sacrifice material gain in favor of moral sentiment as an indication of irrationality, the term “rationality” being misused as a synonym for “consistent pursuit of self interest.”
 - ▶ [But] the subjects’ demand for generosity responded to prices in a way no different from the demand say, for ice cream [if it costs more to be nice, people are less nice].



Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ “[T]he social preferences that become salient in a population depend critically on the manner in which a people’s institutions and livelihood frame social interactions and shape the process of social learning.”
 - ▶ Aumann: correlated equilibrium
 - ▶ “Among the Au and Gnau people in Papua New Guinea, ultimatum game offers of more than half the pie were common. Moreover, while even splits were commonly accepted, both higher and lower offers were rejected with about equal frequency. This behavior struck the economists on our team as odd, to say the least. But to the anthropologists it was not surprising in light of the widespread practice of competitive gift giving as a means of establishing status and subordination in these and many other New Guinea societies.”
- ▶ Social institutions serve as cues for appropriate behavior.
 - ▶ “[S]ocial structure affects behavior in ways other than those captured by the money payoffs of the game, in this case by suggesting appropriate behavior (the exchange game) or identifying some individuals as “deserving” (the test manipulation).”

Bowles and Gintis - A Cooperative Species (selections)

- ▶ Behavior is conditioned on group membership.
 - ▶ Klee vs. Kandinsky
 - ▶ Flemish and Walloons
- ▶ “[S]uccessful collective action among homogeneous ethnic communities . . . is attributable to the existence of norms and institutions that facilitate the sanctioning of non contributors.”
- ▶ “people think that cooperating is the right thing to do and enjoy doing it, and that they dislike unfair treatment and enjoy punishing those who violate norms of fairness.”