



Reason and Intuition in the Moral Life

A Cognitivist Defense of Moral Intuitions

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Fat Man and the Cave



Illustration courtesy of Darren Hick



Characteristics of Moral Intuitions

- Arrived at quickly
- “Appear” in consciousness with a perception-like quality
- Sometimes unable to provide theory-backed reasons for the judgment



Characteristics of Reasoned Judgments

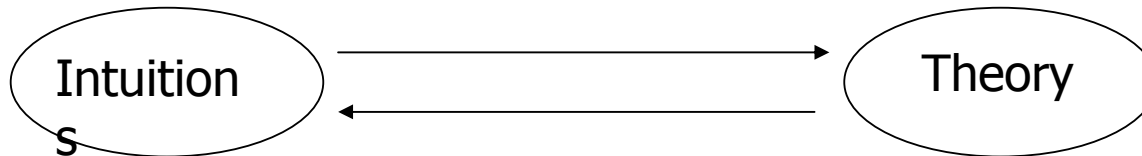
- Arrived at slowly
- Require conscious deliberation
- Reasons for judgment are always available
- Reasoning may be syllogistic:
 - Harm is morally bad
 - This is a case of harm
 - Therefore, this is morally bad



The Problem for Cognitivist Theories of Morality

- Online moral judgments share the characteristics of intuitions
- Intuitions do not seem to be based on or derive from explicit reasoning
- The task for cognitivists is to show how moral intuitions can be grounded in reason

Reflective Equilibrium



Intuitions inform theory
Intuitions are judged against theory

Infer general moral principles and
mid-level rules

- When conflict occurs:
 - The theory must be modified; or
 - The intuition must be modified
- The goal is maximum consonance between intuition and theory



Rawls on Reflective Equilibrium

- “[Rational] justification is a matter of the mutual support of many considerations, of everything fitting together into one coherent view.”

A Theory of Justice, p. 502



The Aim

- Show how can reflective equilibrium be psychologically realized



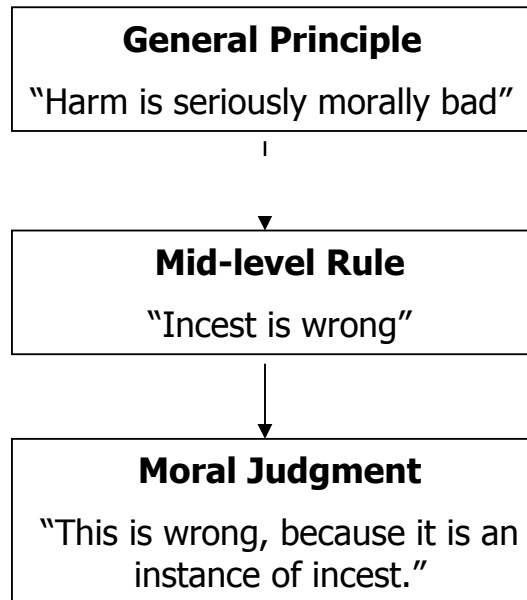
Two Initial Problems

- **Moral dumbfounding:** Seems to show that moral judgments do not respond to reasons. Not directly a challenge to reflective equilibrium, but to any version of cognitivism.
- **Two-Systems Theory:** Generally holds that intuitive (System 1) judgments are not corrigible to deliberative (System 2) reasoning, so seems to show that reflective equilibrium is not psychologically possible.



Moral Dumbfounding

- An alternative model:

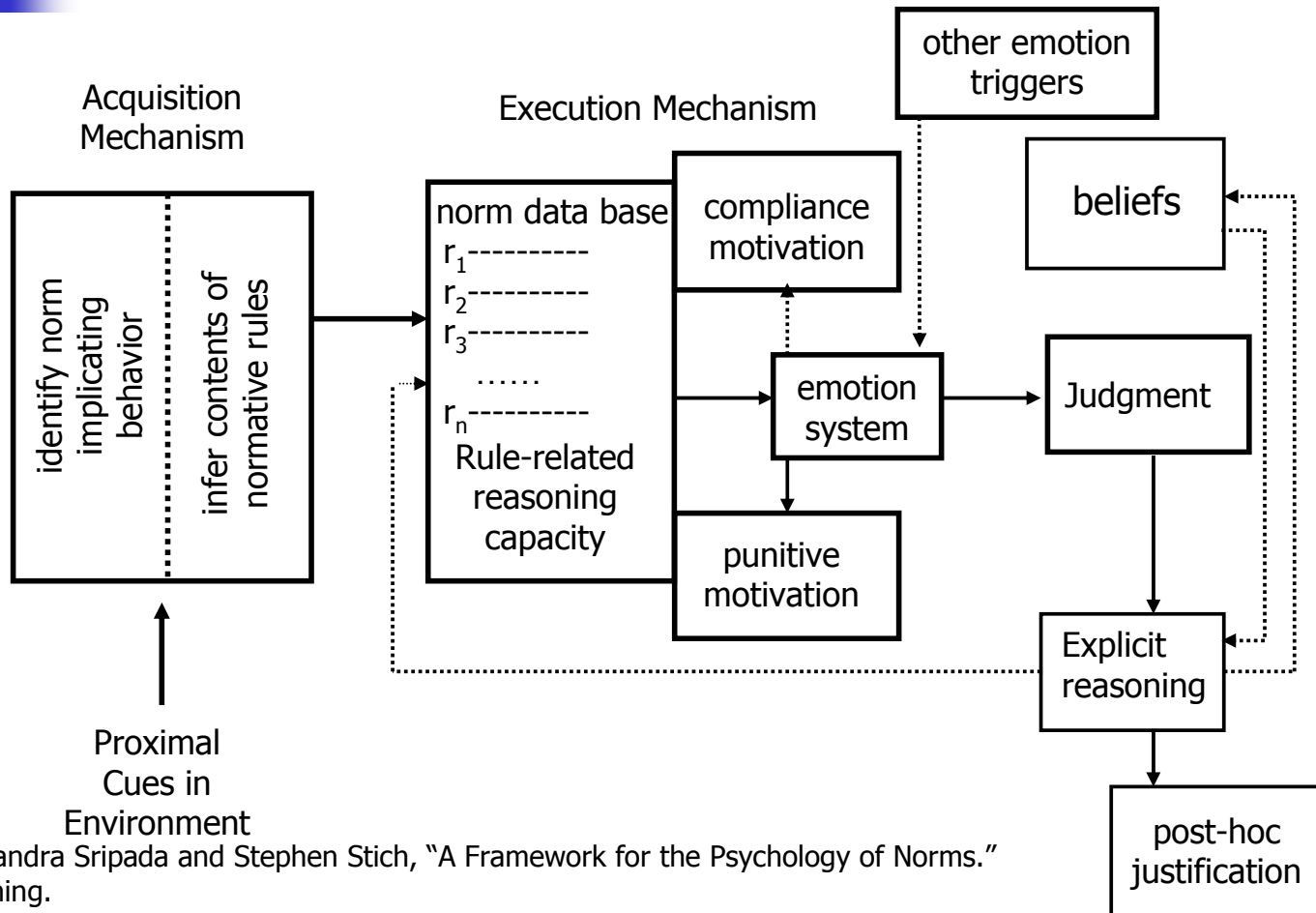




Two Systems

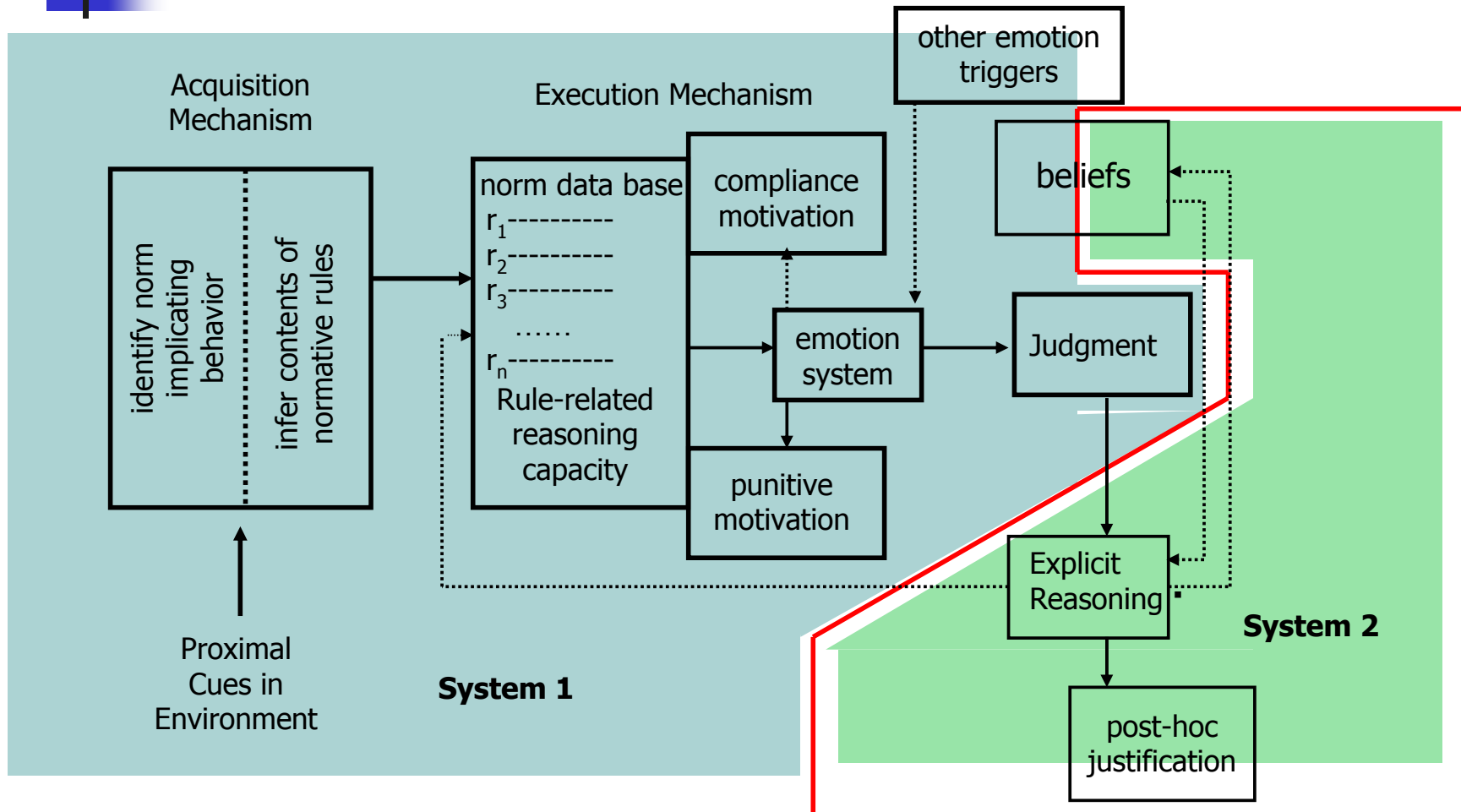
- General consensus in cognitive science that there are two systems in the mind
 - System one: quick, not subject to learning, generally unalterable
 - System two: conscious, slow, learned, generally alterable

A Model of the Psychology of Norms



From Chandra Sripada and Stephen Stich, "A Framework for the Psychology of Norms." Forthcoming.

Drawing the Line





System 2 Beliefs

- Frankish has described System 2 beliefs as being “commitments” at the System 1 level
- A commitment is a System 1 intention to think and act in the future as if a belief were true
- For what follows, assume this is the correct model for System 2 belief



An Important Distinction

- Two uses of the term “norm”
 - Descriptive sense: a norm is an action-guiding rule; also used to evaluate actions and agents (System 1)
 - Normative sense: these are the correct norms, or standards of what our action-guiding rules ought to be (System 2)



Descriptive

- Attempt to ascertain what rules actually govern our judgments
 - Our rules database is inaccessible
 - Our data are our moral judgments
 - From our judgments we can infer the rules we actually have



Normative

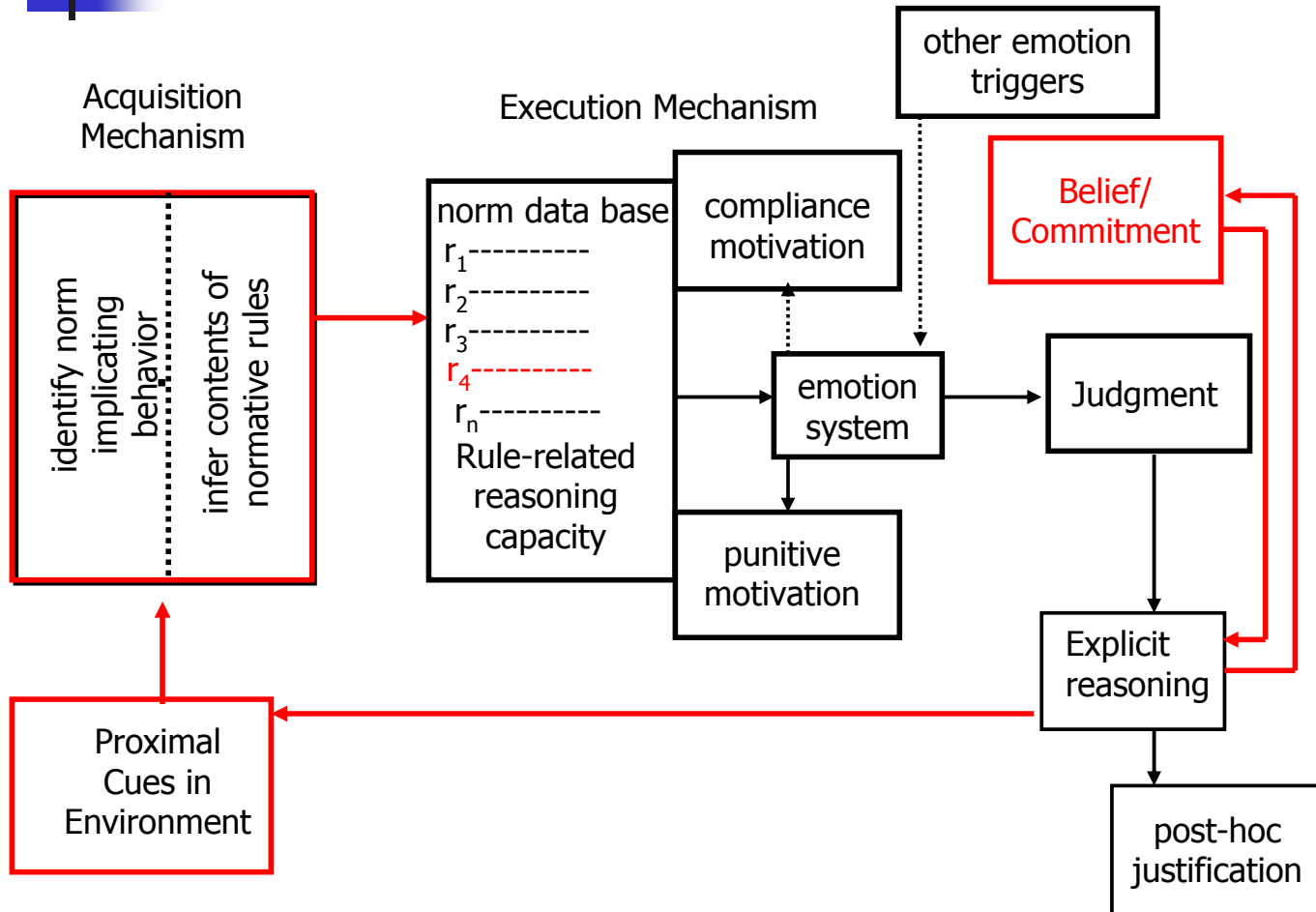
- Attempt to ascertain what universal rules and principles *ought* to govern human behavior
- We can map up our theories and judgments to see:
 - That we are failing to make important judgments that we believe we should; or
 - That we are consistently judging something the wrong way (e.g., always in favor of ourselves)



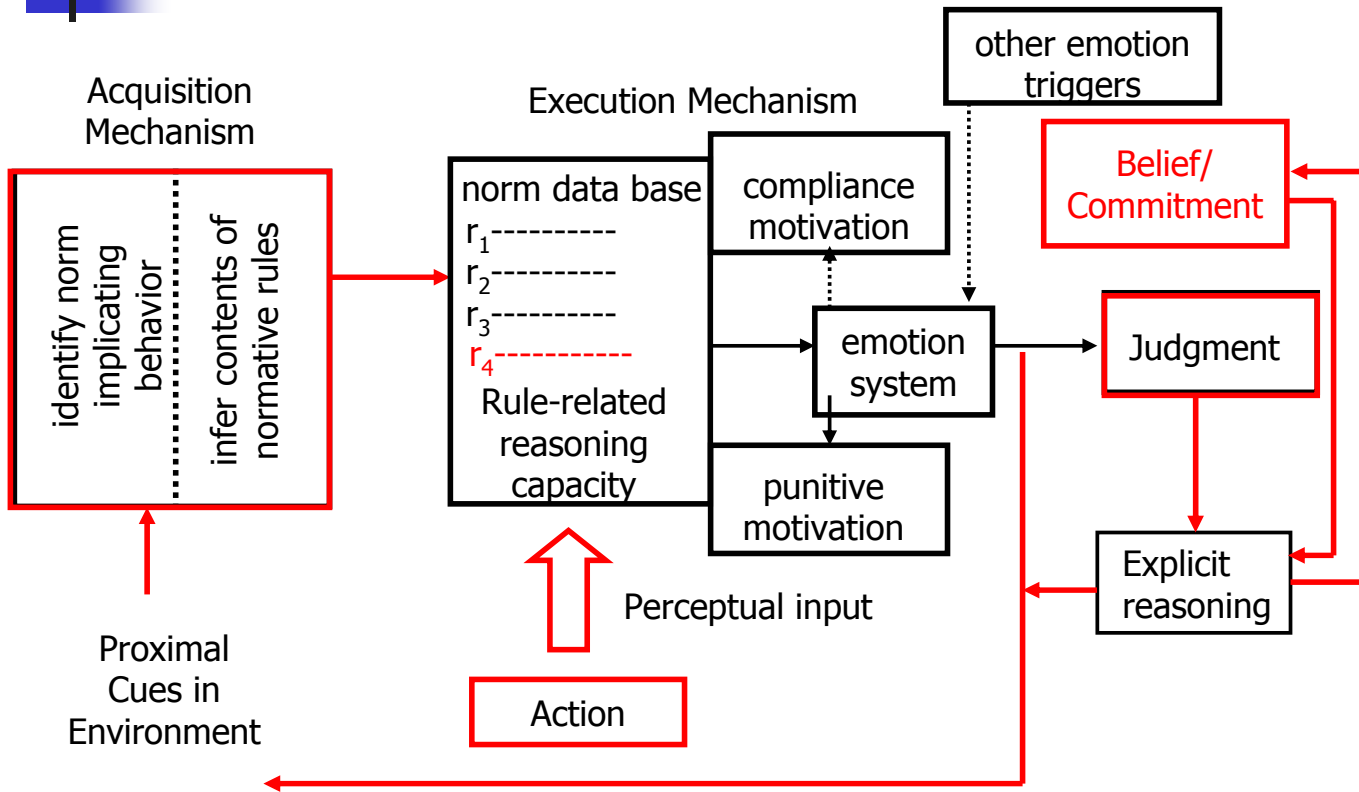
Rules Acquisition System

- The acquisition system could provide such an indirect route
- Do we have reason to believe it remains intact throughout life?
 - Language acquisition as analogy
 - Independent reason for thinking it does

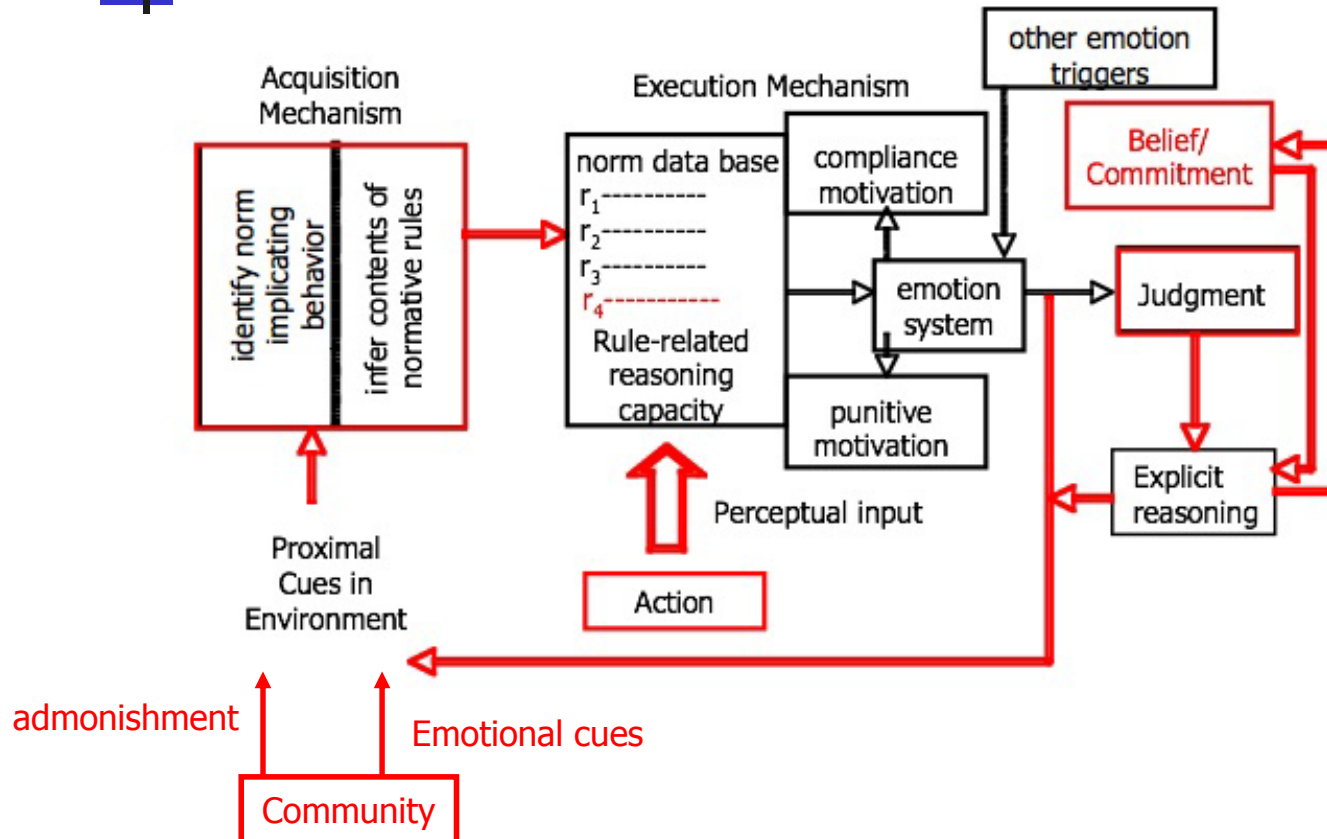
Adding New Rules



Adding New Rules II



Adding New Rules III





Conclusions

- This shows “how possibly” system 2 theories can get instantiated at the system 1 level
- Gives an account for how reflective equilibrium could be psychologically realized
- A defense of moral cognitivism



Questions?

