

Short Essay Questions : Moral Psychology

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0.1. Instructions

Choose any one question. Do not attempt to answer more than one question in your essay.

0.2. Bespoke Questions

We encourage you to devise your own question through discussion with s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk, or to adapt one of the questions below to your interests. Your question must then be submitted using a form on the philosophy web pages and formally approved.

Do not answer a question not on this list without written approval.

0.3. Lecture Materials

Each question draws on specific sections of the lecture material, which also provide sources. You do not have to use the lecture material but your essay will probably be marked down if it could have been improved by making better use of the lecture material. It may be prudent to ensure that you understand the sections relevant to your chosen question before answering it.

0.4. Glossary

The lecture materials include a glossary to facilitate communication between us. You may deviate from the glossary providing you explicate your terms and providing you have good reason for doing so.

0.5. Advice

The questions below are written with a view to allowing a wide range of good answers, including some your examiners may not have foreseen. Your essay should answer the question chosen but it need not provide a complete answer. The best essays are often tightly focussed on one aspect of the question. This is fine: just be sure to explain the part of the question you are addressing and demonstrate that you are aware of what else would be needed to fully answer the question.

0.6. Structure

Open your essay by stating the thesis you will defend.

If necessary (ideally not), explain how the thesis is relevant to your chosen question.

The rest of your essay should provide a single coherent line of argument for your thesis and nothing else.

0.7. Difficulty Level

Some questions permit answers that are relatively straightforward to establish. In general, you should not limit yourself to establishing a straightforward answer if aiming for a high mark.

0.8. Support for Planning

One of the seminars for this course will provide you with an opportunity to discuss your plans.

0.9. Marking Criteria

This course uses the standard philosophy marking criteria. Ideally your essay will demonstrate an awareness of a philosophical issue in moral psychology. We are aware that students taking this course may come from a variety of disciplines. Your essay can be written in the style of an essay from any of the disciplines covered on this course.

0.10. Citations

Use exactly one of the following citation styles: APA, Harvard or Chicago.

Be specific in your citations by, for example, giving a page number or specifying a particular study.

0.11. Word Count

Everything counts towards the word limit.

Acronyms, abbreviations and contractions count as the corresponding number of full words. For example, TLA counts as three words. (Hint: do not invent acronyms. Your readers are miserable enough already.)

There are many ways to count words. Your essay must be under the word limit according to any way of counting words. Your examiners' ways of counting words may not match your own, so leave a good margin.

Examiners will stop reading if they hit the word limit.

1. How, if at all, do feelings or emotions influence ethical judgements?

1.1. Hints

Your answer may (and probably should) focus on a single feeling or emotion such as disgust.

Please also follow the general instructions for *Short Essay Questions*.

1.2. Lecture Notes

This is not an exhaustive list but may help you if you missed something. The list may grow over the weeks as lectures are added. Consider also using the search function.

The following lectures contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Lecture 01*
- *Lecture 02*

The following sections contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Does emotion influence moral judgment or merely motivate morally relevant action? (Reprise)* in Lecture 09
- *Moral Disengagement: Significance* in Lecture 03
- *Moral Intuitions and Emotions: Evidence* in Lecture 01
- *Moral Intuitions and Emotions: Evaluating the Evidence* in Lecture 02
- *Moral Intuitions and an Affect Heuristic* in Lecture 01

1.3. Reading

If you are following the lecture notes and seminars, you should already know what to read. You do not need to consult this list. This is only for people coming to the assignment without using the lecture notes (not recommended).

- Schnall et al. (2008)
- Sinnott-Armstrong et al. (2010)

1.4. Further Reading

- Chapman & Anderson (2013)

- Landy & Goodwin (2015)
- Salvo et al. (2025)
- Yang et al. (2013)
- Nichols (2002)
- Piazza et al. (2018)
- Tracy et al. (2019)

1.5. Where to Find the Reading?

In some cases the references section already includes a link to help you find the reading. (These links will not appear in this pdf.)

If there is no link in the references section, start by searching for the title (and, if that fails, by title and authors) on google scholar. If this fails, the library has resources. If those fail, please check first with others on the course. If you still have problems, you may email your seminar tutor.

2. What is a heuristic? What role, if any, do heuristics play in explaining ethical judgement?

2.1. Hints

You almost certainly want to focus on the Affect Heuristic. (Although other heuristics are probably involved in ethical judgements, it is unlikely that they play a special role in specifically ethical judgements.)

You are likely to want to focus specifically on ethical intuitions (as these are probably the only kind of ethical judgements where heuristics play a distinctive role).

Please also follow the general instructions for *Short Essay Questions*.

2.2. Lecture Notes

This is not an exhaustive list but may help you if you missed something. The list may grow over the weeks as lectures are added. Consider also using the search function.

The following sections contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *The Affect Heuristic and Risk: A Case Study* in Lecture 02
- *Why Is the Affect Heuristic Significant?* in Lecture 02
- *Does emotion influence moral judgment or merely motivate morally relevant action? (Reprise)* in Lecture 09
- *Moral Intuitions* in Lecture 01
- *Moral Intuitions and Emotions: Evaluating the Evidence* in Lecture 02
- *Moral Intuitions and an Affect Heuristic* in Lecture 01

2.3. Reading

If you are following the lecture notes and seminars, you should already know what to read. You do not need to consult this list. This is only for people coming to the assignment without using the lecture notes (not recommended).

- Sinnott-Armstrong et al. (2010)
- Pachur et al. (2012)

2.4. Further Reading

- Kahneman & Frederick (2005)

2.5. Where to Find the Reading?

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3. On moral dumbfounding and moral disengagement

EITHER:

What challenge, if any, to theory of ethical judgements is posed by the possibility of moral dumbfounding?

OR:

What challenge, if any, to theory of ethical judgements is posed by the possibility of moral disengagement?

OR (most ambitious?):

What challenge, if any, to theory of ethical judgements is posed by the twin possibilities of moral dumbfounding and moral disengagement?

3.1. Hints

State which of the three questions (above) you are answering. (Do not write an essay titled 'On moral dumbfounding and moral disengagement'! That is not a question.)

Whichever question you attempt, be sure to answer with respect to a single theory of ethical judgement. Although several such theories were cited in the lecture notes linked below, the theory you most likely want to consider is Haidt & Bjorklund (2008)'s.

Please also follow the general instructions for *Short Essay Questions*.

3.2. Lecture Notes

This is not an exhaustive list but may help you if you missed something. The list may grow over the weeks as lectures are added. Consider also using the search function.

The following lecture contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Lecture 03*

3.3. Reading

If you are following the lecture notes and seminars, you should already know what to read. You do not need to consult this list. This is only for people coming to the assignment without using the lecture notes (not recommended).

- Haidt et al. (2000)

- Bandura (2002)
- Haidt & Bjorklund (2008)

3.4. Further Reading

- Hindriks (2014)
- Bandura et al. (1996)
- McAlister et al. (2006)
- Osofsky et al. (2005)
- Royzman et al. (2015)
- McHugh et al. (2017)

3.5. Where to Find the Reading?

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If there is no link in the references section, start by searching for the title (and, if that fails, by title and authors) on google scholar. If this fails, the library has resources. If those fail, please check first with others on the course. If you still have problems, you may email your seminar tutor.

4. Are there cultural differences in moral psychology?

4.1. Hints

Your answer may (and probably should) focus on discoveries from Moral Foundations Theory.

Please also follow the general instructions for *Short Essay Questions*.

4.2. Lecture Notes

This is not an exhaustive list but may help you if you missed something. The list may grow over the weeks as lectures are added. Consider also using the search function.

The following lectures contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Lecture 04*
- *Lecture 05*

The following section contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Moral Foundations Theory Reprise* in Lecture 09

4.3. Reading

If you are following the lecture notes and seminars, you should already know what to read. You do not need to consult this list. This is only for people coming to the assignment without using the lecture notes (not recommended).

- Graham et al. (2013)
- Atari et al. (2023)

4.4. Further Reading

- Chakroff et al. (2013)
- Haidt & Bjorklund (2008)
- Kivikangas et al. (2021)

4.5. Where to Find the Reading?

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If there is no link in the references section, start by searching for the title (and, if that fails, by title and authors) on google scholar. If this fails, the library has resources. If those fail, please check first with others on the course. If you still have problems, you may email your seminar tutor.

5. What is moral reframing? Why, if at all, it is sometimes effective in modifying people's behaviour?

5.1. Hints

Be sure you understand what moral reframing is. To answer this question you need to know at least two hypotheses about why moral reframing is effective and to understand which evidence supports each hypothesis (see *The Puzzle of Moral Foundations Theory* in Lecture 05).

Your answer may (and probably should) focus on discoveries from Moral Foundations Theory.

Please also follow the general instructions for *Short Essay Questions*.

5.2. Lecture Notes

This is not an exhaustive list but may help you if you missed something. The list may grow over the weeks as lectures are added. Consider also using the search function.

The following sections contain material relevant to answering this question.

- *Framing Changes Ethical Attitudes* in Lecture 05
- *The Puzzle of Moral Foundations Theory* in Lecture 05
- *Moral Reframing and Process Dissociation* in Lecture 09

5.3. Reading

If you are following the lecture notes and seminars, you should already know what to read. You do not need to consult this list. This is only for people coming to the assignment without using the lecture notes (not recommended).

- Feinberg & Willer (2019)
- Wolsko et al. (2016)
- Feinberg & Willer (2015)

5.4. Further Reading

- Graham et al. (2009)
- Hurst & Stern (2020)

- Wolsko (2017)

5.5. Where to Find the Reading?

In some cases the references section already includes a link to help you find the reading. (These links will not appear in this pdf.)

If there is no link in the references section, start by searching for the title (and, if that fails, by title and authors) on google scholar. If this fails, the library has resources. If those fail, please check first with others on the course. If you still have problems, you may email your seminar tutor.

Glossary

Affect Heuristic In the context of moral psychology, the Affect Heuristic is this principle: ‘if thinking about an act [...] makes you feel bad [...], then judge that it is morally wrong’ (Sinnott-Armstrong et al. 2010). These authors hypothesise that the Affect Heuristic explains moral intuitions.

A different (but related) Affect Heuristic has also been postulated to explain how people make judgements about risky things are: The more dread you feel when imagining an event, the more risky you should judge it is (see Pachur et al. 2012. 6

ethical intuition See moral intuition. 6

ethical judgement For a claim to be among a person’s judgements is for them to take it to be true. An ethical judgement is just a judgement involving something ethical. (Same as moral judgement.) 6, 15, 16

heuristic A *heuristic* links an inaccessible attribute to an accessible attribute such that, within a limited but useful range of situations, someone could track the inaccessible attribute by computing the accessible attribute. 6

inaccessible An attribute is *inaccessible* in a context just if it is difficult or impossible, in that context, to discern substantive truths about that attribute. For example, in ordinary life and for most people the attribute *being further from Kilmerly (in Wales) than Steve’s brother Matt is* would be inaccessible.

See Kahneman & Frederick (2005, p. 271): ‘We adopt the term accessibility to refer to the ease (or effort) with which particular mental contents come to mind.’ 14

moral disengagement Moral disengagement occurs when self-sanctions are disengaged from conduct. To illustrate, an executioner may avoid self-sanctioning for killing by reframing the role they play as ‘babysitting’ (Bandura 2002, p. 103). Bandura (2002, p. 111) identifies several mechanisms of moral disengagement: ‘The disengagement may centre on redefining harmful conduct as honourable by moral justification, exonerating social comparison and sanitising language. It may focus on agency of action so that perpetrators can minimise their role in causing harm by diffusion and displacement of responsibility. It may involve

minimising or distorting the harm that follows from detrimental actions; and the disengagement may include dehumanising and blaming the victims of the maltreatment.’ 8

moral dumbfounding ‘the stubborn and puzzled maintenance of an [ethical] judgment without supporting reasons’ (Haidt et al. 2000, p. 1). As McHugh et al. (2017, p.) note, subsequent researchers have given different definitions of moral dumbfounding so that ‘there is [currently] no single, agreed definition of moral dumbfounding.’ I adopt the original authors’ definition, as should you unless there are good reasons to depart from it. 8

Moral Foundations Theory The theory that moral pluralism is true; moral foundations are innate but also subject to cultural learning, and the Social Intuitionist Model of Moral Judgement is correct (Graham et al. 2019). Proponents often claim, further, that cultural variation in how these innate foundations are woven into ethical abilities can be measured using the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al. 2009; Graham et al. 2011). Some empirical objections have been offered (Davis et al. 2016; Davis et al. 2017; Doğruyol et al. 2019). See ??.

moral intuition According to this lecturer, a person’s intuitions are the claims they take to be true independently of whether those claims are justified inferentially. And a person’s *moral* intuitions are simply those of their intuitions that concern ethical matters.

According to Sinnott-Armstrong et al. (2010, p. 256), moral intuitions are ‘strong, stable, immediate moral beliefs.’ 14

moral judgement For a claim to be among a person’s judgements is for them to take it to be true. A moral judgement is just a judgement involving something moral. (Same as ethical judgement.) 14

moral reframing ‘A technique in which a position an individual would not normally support is framed in a way that it is consistent with that individual’s moral values. [...] In the political arena, moral reframing involves arguing in favor of a political position that members of a political group would not normally support in terms of moral concerns that the members strongly ascribe to’ (Feinberg & Willer 2019, pp. 2–3).

Social Intuitionist Model of Moral Judgement A model on which intuitive processes are directly responsible for moral judgements (Haidt & Bjorklund 2008). One’s own reasoning does not typically affect one’s own moral judgements, but (outside philosophy, perhaps) is typically

used only to provide post-hoc justification after moral judgements are made. Reasoning does affect others' moral intuitions, and so provides a mechanism for cultural learning. 15

theory of ethical judgement A psychological theory which explains how people arrive at ethical judgements. For example, Haidt & Bjorklund (2008, p. 189)'s *Social Intuitionist Model* is a theory of ethical judgement.
8

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