

Lecture 05 Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil?

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Q: What do discoveries concerning human moral psychology imply for the feasibility of democratically mitigating climate change?

0.1. Feinberg & Willer, 2013's position

1. 'Moral convictions and the emotions they evoke shape political attitudes'
2. There are at least two fundamental domains of human morality, including harm and purity.
3. 'liberals and conservatives possess different moral profiles'
4. 'liberals express greater levels of environmental concern than do conservatives in part because liberals are more likely to view environmental issues in moral terms'
5. 'exposing conservatives to proenvironmental appeals based on moral concerns that uniquely resonate with them will lead them to view the environment in moral terms and be more supportive of proenvironmental efforts' (Feinberg & Willer 2013)

1. Extending the Result

Extension 1: Can it change how people act? Kidwell et al. (2013) : yes!

'we developed tailored persuasive messages that appealed to the individualizing foundations for liberals, based on fairness and avoiding harm to others, and the binding foundation for conservatives, based on duty and an obligation to adhere to authority. We found that these congruent appeals significantly affected consumers' acquisition, usage, and recycling intentions and behaviors' (Kidwell et al. 2013).

Extension 2: Can liberals' support for issues also be changed by ethical reframing? Day et al. (2014) found no evidence that they can; Feinberg & Willer (2015) found evidence that they can (framing an issue about official languages in terms of harm and fairness).

Feinberg & Willer (2015, p. 1667) comment on Day et al. (2014):

'It is possible that the inconsistency of the moral framing effects in these studies owed to the spare sentence-long, stimuli used in the studies.'

2. Moral Foundations Theory: Empirical Objections

2.1. Mere Moralizing

'This article [distinguishes] between subjective conceptions of morality (which are, after all, indistinguishable from mere moralizing) and morality from a more independent, objective perspective [...] the moral valuation of ingroup loyalty, obedience to authority, and purity concerns is associated with attitudes and belief systems that may be considered prejudicial and therefore morally unsavory liberal-conservative differences in the endorsement of these three 'binding' intuitions may be attributable, at least in part, to the fact that conservatives tend to be higher than liberals on authoritarianism. Furthermore, liberal-conservative differences in the endorsement of fairness and avoidance of harm are attributable to the fact that liberals tend to be lower than conservatives on social dominance orientation [...] The fact that these two types of moral concerns have opposite effects on intergroup hostility and support for discrimination against foreigners and immigrants raises questions about the assumption that 'binding' and 'individualizing' (or perhaps 'humanistic' concerns) should be treated as operating on the same moral plane, objectively speaking' (Kugler et al. 2014, p. 416).

2.2. It's All Just Harm

'harm is central in moral cognition across moral diversity for both liberals and conservatives' (Schein & Gray 2015, p. 1158).

We found evidence for 'a common dyadic template than with a specific number of distinct moral mechanisms that are differentially expressed across liberals and conservatives' (Schein & Gray 2015, p. 1158).

(Opposing view: Chakroff et al. (2013, 2017) argue, independently of Moral Foundations Theory, that harm and purity judgements reflect distinct cognitive processes.)

2.3. No Scalar Invariance

'A finding of measurement invariance would provide more confidence that use of the MFQ across cultures can shed light on meaningful differences between cultures rather than merely reflecting the measurement properties of the MFQ' (Iurino & Saucier 2018, p. 2)

'the five-factor model of MFQ revealed a good fit to the data on both WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples. Besides, the five-factor model yielded a better fit to the data as compared to the two-factor model of MFQ. Measurement invariance test across samples validated factor structure for the five-factor model, yet a comparison of samples provided metric non-invariance implying that item loadings are different across groups

[...] although the same statements tap into the same moral foundations in each case, the strength of the link between the statements and the foundations were different in WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultures' (Doğruyol et al. 2019).

'across subscales, there were problems with scalar invariance, which suggests that researchers may need to carefully consider whether this scale is working similarly across groups before conducting mean comparisons' (Davis et al. 2016, p. e27)

'entire literatures can develop on the basis of faulty measurement assumptions.' (Davis et al. 2017, p. 128)

3. Alternative Explanations of (5)?

Could we explain the observed effects on attitudes and actions without appeal to cultural variation in moral concerns (and so without invoking Moral Foundations Theory)?

3.1. Fluency Effects

'the persuasiveness of a message is enhanced when it fits with the observer's mental representational state (Schwarz and Clore 1983). When encountering information that is consistent with their beliefs, values, and opinions, individuals are likely to experience a feeling of fluency or ease of comprehension, generating a "feels right" experience (Reber, Schwarz, and Winkiel-

man 2004). Similar to positive affect (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004), in which individuals feel a generalized state of emotional arousal, fluency additionally engenders a feeling that something "just fits" by feeling genuine and desirable (Lee and Aaker 2004). Moreover, Kim et al. (2009) suggest that this feeling "right" elicits more favorable evaluations of a message because individuals misattribute their feeling-right experience to the quality of the persuasive message' (Kidwell et al. 2013, p. 352)

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