

Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil?

--- lecturer: s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

Philosophically significant questions in moral psychology have recently been a focus of investigation in cognitive, social, comparative or developmental psychology, neuroscience or anthropology. These questions include:

Why do humans experience **moral intuitions**, and why do they make **ethical judgements**? Is this a consequence of their **cooperative** natures (Hamlin 2015)? Or could it be an elaborate way of managing **terror of death** (Pyszczynski 2016)?

What are the effects of **social inequality** on the ethical behaviours of **nonhuman animals** (Hippel, Ronay, and Maddux 2016)?

Why does morality vary so much across **cultures**, and why are there themes that recur across cultures (Graham et al. 2013; Curry, Mullins, and Whitehouse 2019)?

Could **scientific discoveries** undermine or support **moral principles** (Singer 2005; Greene 2014)?

Do humans substantially and systematically disagree on ethical matters? If so, does this threaten **moral realism** or **moral epistemology** (Doris and Plakias 2008; Enoch 2009; McGrath 2008)?

Moral judgements modulate, and are modulated by, thoughts and acts of **physical cleansing** (Schnall, Benton, and Harvey 2008; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006). What, if anything, does this tell us about the nature of morality in humans?

What do **dual-process theories of moral cognition** claim? Is there any evidence for them (Van Bavel, FeldmanHall, and Mende-Siedlecki 2015; Greene 2015)?

What is the role of **emotion** in moral psychology (Haidt 2001; Huebner, Dwyer, and Hauser 2009; Cameron, Lindquist, and Gray 2015; Nichols 2002)?

Are there **innate** drivers of morality? Why do **infants** behave prosocially and respond to prosocial behaviour by others from the second year of life or earlier (Brownell 2013; Hamlin, Wynn & Bloom 2007; Hamlin 2013; Olson & Spelke 2008)?

Your **brain** can distinguish **harm-related events** in around 120 milliseconds (Decety and Cacioppo 2012). What might this reveal about the origins of your moral principles?

Why do ethical failures threaten the **sense of self** (Barkan et al. 2012; Shalvi et al. 2015)?

Could human moral psychology make **mitigating climate change** democratically infeasible (Markowitz and Shariff 2012; Gardiner 2011)? And why are some people moved to act on climate change by thoughts of **harm**, others by thoughts of **purity** (Feinberg & Willer 2013)?

Sources

Barkan, Rachel, Shahar Ayal, Francesca Gino, and Dan Ariely. 2012. "The Pot Calling the Kettle Black: Distancing Response to Ethical Dissonance." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 141 (4): 757–73. doi:[10.1037/a0027588](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027588).

Brownell, Celia A. 2013. "Early Development of Prosocial Behavior: Current Perspectives." *Infancy* 18 (1): 1–9. doi:[10.1111/infa.12004](https://doi.org/10.1111/infa.12004).

- Cameron, C. Daryl, Kristen A. Lindquist, and Kurt Gray. 2015. "A Constructionist Review of Morality and Emotions: No Evidence for Specific Links Between Moral Content and Discrete Emotions." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 19 (4): 371–94. doi:[10.1177/1088868314566683](https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314566683).
- Curry, O. S., D. A. Mullins, and H. Whitehouse. 2019. "Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies." *Current Anthropology*.
- Decety, Jean, and Stephanie Cacioppo. 2012. "The Speed of Morality: A High-Density Electrical Neuroimaging Study." *Journal of Neurophysiology* 108 (11): 3068–72. doi:[10.1152/jn.00473.2012](https://doi.org/10.1152/jn.00473.2012).
- Doris, John M., and Alexandra Plakias. 2008. "How to Argue About Disagreement: Evaluative Diversity and Moral Realism." In *Moral Psychology, Vol 2: The Cognitive Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity*, 303–31. Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.
- Enoch, David. 2009. "How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (1): 15–50. doi:[10.1007/s10892-008-9041-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-008-9041-z).
- Feinberg, Matthew, and Robb Willer. 2013. "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes." *Psychological Science* 24 (1): 56–62. doi:[10.1177/0956797612449177](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612449177).
- Gardiner, Stephen M. 2011. *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*. Oxford University Press.
- Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, Sena Koleva, Matt Motyl, Ravi Iyer, Sean P. Wojcik, and Peter H. Ditto. 2013. "Chapter Two - Moral Foundations Theory: The Pragmatic Validity of Moral Pluralism." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by Patricia Devine and Ashby Plant, 47:55–130. Academic Press. doi:[10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00002-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00002-4).
- Greene, Joshua D. 2014. "Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics." *Ethics* 124 (4): 695–726. doi:[10.1086/675875](https://doi.org/10.1086/675875).
- . 2015. "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Moral Judgment and Decision Making." In *The Moral Brain: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, 197–220. Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2001. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review* 108 (4): 814–34. doi:[10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814).
- Hamlin, J Kiley. 2015. "The Infantile Origins of Our Moral Brains." In *The Moral Brain: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Thalia Wheatley and Jean Decety, 105–22. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Hamlin, J. Kiley. 2013. "Moral Judgment and Action in Preverbal Infants and Toddlers: Evidence for an Innate Moral Core." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (3): 186–93. doi:[10.1177/0963721412470687](https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721412470687).
- Hamlin, J. Kiley, Karen Wynn, and Paul Bloom. 2007. "Social Evaluation by Preverbal Infants." *Nature* 450 (7169): 557–59. doi:[10.1038/nature06288](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature06288).
- Hippel, William von, Richard Ronay, and William W Maddux. 2016. "Of Baboons and Elephants: Inequality and the Evolution of Immoral Leadership." In *The Social Psychology of Morality*, edited by Mario Ed Mikulincer and Phillip R Shaver, 289–303. London: Routledge.
- Huebner, Bryce, Susan Dwyer, and Marc Hauser. 2009. "The Role of Emotion in Moral Psychology." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13 (1): 1–6. doi:[10.1016/j.tics.2008.09.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2008.09.006).

- Markowitz, Ezra M., and Azim F. Shariff. 2012. "Climate Change and Moral Judgement." *Nature Climate Change* 2 (4): 243–47. doi:[10.1038/nclimate1378](https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate1378).
- McGrath, Sarah. 2008. "Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3. Oxford University Press: 87–107.
- Nichols, Shaun. 2002. "Norms with Feeling: Towards a Psychological Account of Moral Judgment." *Cognition* 84 (2): 221–36. doi:[10.1016/S0010-0277\(02\)00048-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(02)00048-3).
- Olson, Kristina R., and Elizabeth S. Spelke. 2008. "Foundations of Cooperation in Young Children." *Cognition* 108 (1): 222–31. doi:[10.1016/j.cognition.2007.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2007.12.003).
- Pyszczynski, Tom. 2016. "God Save Us God Save Us: A Terror Management Perspective on Morality." In *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, edited by Mario Ed Mikulincer and Phillip R Shaver, 21–39. London: Routledge.
- Schnall, Simone, Jennifer Benton, and Sophie Harvey. 2008. "With a Clean Conscience: Cleanliness Reduces the Severity of Moral Judgments." *Psychological Science* 19 (12): 1219–22. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02227.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02227.x).
- Shalvi, Shaul, Francesca Gino, Rachel Barkan, and Shahar Ayal. 2015. "Self-Serving Justifications: Doing Wrong and Feeling Moral." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24 (2): 125–30. doi:[10.1177/0963721414553264](https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414553264).
- Singer, Peter. 2005. "Ethics and Intuitions." *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (3): 331–52. doi:[10.1007/s10892-005-3508-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-005-3508-y).
- Van Bavel, Jay J, Oriël FeldmanHall, and Peter Mende-Siedlecki. 2015. "The Neuroscience of Moral Cognition: From Dual Processes to Dynamic Systems." *Current Opinion in Psychology, Morality and ethics*, 6 (December): 167–72. doi:[10.1016/j.copsy.2015.08.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2015.08.009).
- Zhong, Chen-Bo, and Katie Liljenquist. 2006. "Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing." *Science* 313 (5792): 1451–2. doi:[10.1126/science.1130726](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1130726).

Textbooks

- Doris, John M, Moral Psychology Research Group, and others. *The Moral Psychology Handbook*. OUP Oxford, 2010.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. *Moral Psychology: Adaptations and Innateness. The Evolution of Morality*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2008.
- . *Moral Psychology: Intuition and Diversity. The Cognitive Science of Morality*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2008.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, and Christian B Miller. *Moral Psychology: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*. Vol. 3. MIT press, 2008.