

Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil? (Autumn Term 2019-20)

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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

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