

College Guild

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What's On Your Mind?

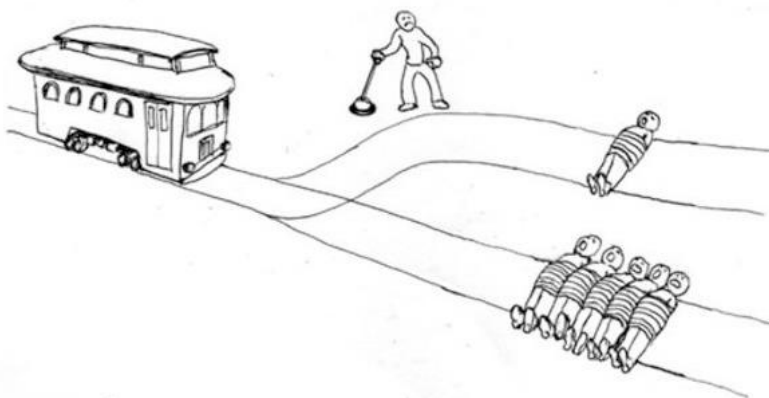
Unit 4 of 6

~ Moral Psychology ~

"About morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after." — Ernest Hemingway

1. Do you agree with Hemingway? Why or why not?
2. Write a paragraph about a time you did something moral that made you feel good.

The Trolley Problem



You are walking along the side of a railroad and you see a loose trolley cart speeding down the tracks. Ahead of the trolley, you see five workers stuck on the tracks, in the trolley's path. To your right, you see a lever that will change the course of the trolley to turn left down a path where only a single worker is stuck. So you are faced with two options:

Option one: Pull the lever so that the trolley's course is changed to the path with only one person and *knowingly* send the trolley to hit them.
Option two: Do nothing and stand by as the trolley barrels down the track toward the five workers.

3. Which do you choose? Why?

The Trolley Problem is believed to have been developed by English philosopher Philippa Foot. Most people choose to pull the lever, taking the life of the single person stuck on the tracks. But still, there are a significant number of people that would just let the trolley barrel down towards the five people because they

see it as a passive option. If you pull the lever, you have been an active participant in the death of a single person even though you saved the lives of five others.

4. Describe how your answer would change if the single person stuck on the tracks were...

- A. A doctor with the cure for cancer.**
- B. A close friend.**
- C. A distant cousin.**
- D. The president of the United States.**

The study of moral psychology is the study of the development of a moral sense. It aims to answer questions like: What is considered good or bad? Who is considered good or bad? Who gets to determine what is good or bad?

5. What is an act that is considered universally “bad”? Is there any situation in which that act would not be considered immoral?

6. Was there someone in your life that taught you right from wrong? Who was it? If not, how did you learn?

Moral Foundations Theory

In order to determine why there is so much variation among moralities from different countries, Haidt and Joseph worked together to create the Moral Foundations Theory. This theory outlines five different foundations of morality that combine and represent the morality of the world. Here are the five foundations:

- 1) Care vs. Harm
- 2) Fairness vs. Cheating
- 3) Loyalty vs. Betrayal
- 4) Authority vs. Subversion
- 5) Liberty vs. Oppression



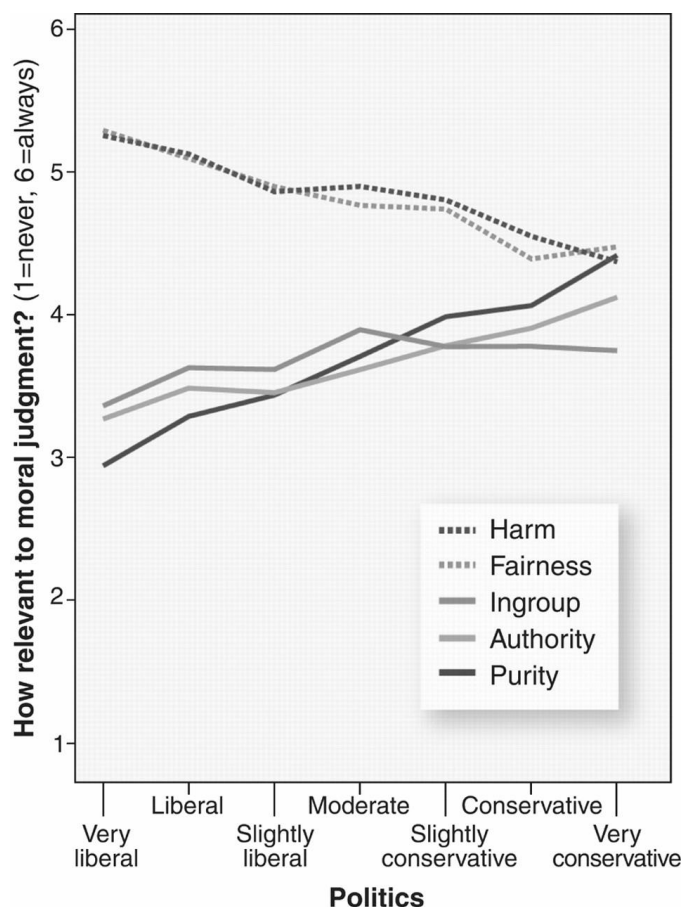
7. Which of the moral foundations do you think is the most universally supported?

8. If you could add a sixth foundation to the Moral Foundations Theory, what would it be? Why?

Although the Moral Foundations Theory exists to outline the values the world generally finds most applicable to morality, there are still huge differences across cultures. These differences support the idea

that our specific beliefs are subject to change based on the environment in which we're socialized. For example, dog meat is consumed in China because it is a norm there, while in the United States, we might be uncomfortable at the thought of eating dog. This is a cultural difference that arises because of socialization.

9. Do people from opposing political groups think that the other group is immoral? Explain.



To the left is a graph depicting how relevant certain moral values are to different political groups. Look at the light dotted line representing **Fairness** and the dark solid line representing **Purity**. If you look above the “Very liberal” label at the bottom, you will notice that liberals think fairness is significantly more relevant to morality than purity. If you look above the “Very conservative” label, you will notice that there is much less variation in relevance between purity and fairness.

10. Explain why there is so much variation in “morality” across the political spectrum.

Haidt and Social Intuitionist Approach

Jonathan Haidt is a moral psychologist who created the Social Intuitionist approach to moral reasoning. Before Haidt, psychologists believed in the Rationalist approach — a model in which they thought moral reasoning came from moral judgment. For example: If you found out a friend cheated on a test, you might think about how that is unfair to the rest of the class, then decide that, because it's unfair, your friend did something bad. That is the Rationalist approach. The Social Intuitionist approach would argue that, as a result of social norms and values, you would decide that your friend did a bad thing the moment they tell you they cheated, before you even think about the outcomes of their actions. Under this approach, we would decide that it's bad because we are socialized to know that cheating is bad. Only later do we go through moral reasoning to justify this snap moral judgment.

11. Write an example of someone's thought process under the Social Intuitionist approach after hearing that a friend stole food to feed their family. Then, write an explanation of their thought process using a Rationalist approach.

Moral dilemmas

12. Give an example of a lie that is harmless (a white lie). How do you feel about telling white lies?

Let's look at some classic moral dilemmas.

You are a very skilled doctor with five dying patients, each of whom needs a different organ in order to live. Unfortunately, there are no organs available to perform any of the transplants. It just so happens that you have a sixth dying patient, suffering from a fatal illness, who will die sooner than the other five if not treated. If this sixth patient dies, you will be able to use his organs to save the five other patients. However, you have a medicine you can give to this sixth patient that will cure his illness so that he won't die. Would you:

a: Wait for the patient to die and then harvest his organs, or...

b: Save the patient even though the other patients won't get his organs?

13. Which do you choose? Explain why.

14. Which of the values in the Moral Foundations Theory (pg. 2) is this dilemma related to?

Jose has the responsibility of filling a position in his firm. His friend Paul has applied and is qualified, but someone else seems even more qualified. Jose wants to give the job to Paul, but he feels guilty, believing that he ought to be impartial. This belief is, however, rejected, as Jose decides that friendship has a moral importance that permits (and perhaps even requires) partiality in some circumstances. So he gives the job to Paul.

15. Do you think Jose made the right decision? Why or why not? What do you think might happen if Jose told Paul that he *only* got the job because they are friends?

16. Choose one of the moral foundations that you haven't written about already and write a fictional story about someone facing this moral dilemma.

Retributive v. Restorative justice

Moral psychology also studies our criminal justice system. Retributive justice refers to the kind of justice our system currently uses in which we punish the individual transgressor. Restorative justice refers to a two-way process in which the transgressors and victims work together to find common ground that also benefits the community. Today, there is a push for criminal systems to move toward restoration as a more effective mode of justice.



Here is an excerpt from a Canadian restorative justice website:

VICTIM–OFFENDER MEDIATION

Victim–offender mediation occurs when victims and offenders meet face-to-face in the presence of a trained facilitator. The parties have an opportunity to talk about the crime, to express their feelings and concerns, to get answers to their questions, and to negotiate a resolution. Support people for both the victim and offender may be present, however, they do not normally participate in the discussion.

COMMUNITY JUSTICE CONFERENCE (and FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES)

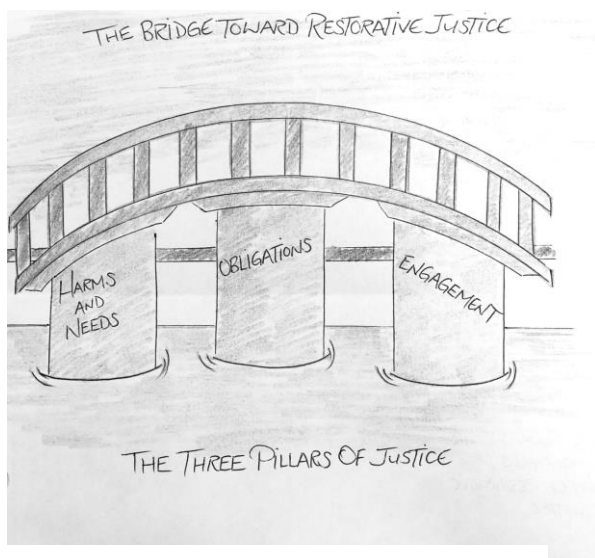
A community justice conference also involves a face-to-face meeting between the victim and offender. A family group conference, however, engages a larger group of participants that includes the support people for both the victim and the offender, relevant professionals, the facilitator, and the investigating officer. All participants have an opportunity to talk about the crime, to express their feelings and concerns, and to get answers to their questions. All participants can also express opinions on how the offender should make amends.



SENTENCING CIRCLE

A sentencing circle involves the same participants as a family group conference, as well as the presiding judge, and defense counsel. As with the other models, each participant is given an equal opportunity to

participate. Everyone works together to arrive at a plan for the offender which will repair the harm caused by the offence. A circle goes beyond developing a sentence for the offender, and engages the support of all participants to assist the offender in fulfilling the terms of the plan.



Artwork by College Guild student Andrew Velez, 2019

17. Write a story about a crime or disagreement that is resolved using restorative justice. Include either a victim–offender mediation, community justice conference, sentencing circle, or a combination. You can write it from the perspective of either the victim or offender.

18. What do you think about the idea of restorative justice?

19. Describe a case in which it would be difficult or impossible to reach a just outcome through the use of restorative justice.

20. What are the advantages and disadvantages of:

- a. Victim–offender mediation?
- b. Community justice conferences?
- c. Sentencing circles?

References

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- <https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/variations-of-the-trolley-problem>
- https://www.motherjones.com/files/emotional_dog_and_rational_tail.pdf

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes