

ENDS VERSUS MEANS: KANTIANS, UTILITARIANS AND MORAL DECISIONS*

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November 12, 2022

Paper coming soon

Abstract

We investigate the overall prevalence and the consistency of consequentialist versus deontological decision-making. Our design includes a real-stakes version of the classical trolley dilemma, four novel games that induce ends-versus-means tradeoffs, and a rule-following task. These main games are supplemented with six classical self-versus-others choice tasks, allowing us to relate consequential/deontological behavior to standard measures of prosociality. Across the six main games, we find a stable prevalence (20 to 40%) of non-consequentialist choices by subjects, but no evidence of stable individual preferences across situations. In particular, trolley behavior predicts no other ends-versus-means choices. In contrast, there is a rather high level of consistency across self-versus-other decisions, but an individuals' degree of prosociality is unrelated to how they choose in ends-versus-means tradeoffs affecting others.

Keywords: morality, deontological, consequentialist, Kantian, trolley, prosocial, social preferences.

*We are grateful for valuable comments to Jean-Francois Bonnefon, Claudia Senik, Jean Tirole, and participants in seminars and conferences at TSE, briq, SciencesPo, PSE, and the University of Chicago. Egshiglen Batbayar, Erik Ortiz Covarrubias, and Luca Michels provided excellent research assistance. Funding by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) through CRC TR 224 (Project A01) is gratefully acknowledged. The study obtained ethics approval from Princeton University (No. 12513) and was preregistered at the AEA RCT Registry ([#AEARCTR-0007714](#))

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