Cultural Diversity as a Window on the Cognitive Architecture of Morality

Type of Funding Request: Online Funding Inquiry
Status of this Funding Request: Draft/Saved

Instructions:

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Funding Request Info

- **Title:** Cultural Diversity as a Window on the Cognitive Architecture of Morality
- **Request Status:** Draft/Saved
- **Funding Area:** Character Virtue Development
- **Last Updated Date:** 08/17/22 10:00am

Cycle & Area

Grant Program:

2022 Funding Cycle

- Submission Due Date is August 19, 2022
- Notification by October 14, 2022

Please select the Funding Area or Strategic Priority that is most relevant to the topic and activities of your proposed project:
Character Virtue Development

JOHN TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION

Project Description

Project Title: Cultural Diversity as a Window on the Cognitive Architecture of Morality
Executive Summary:

Recent research in moral psychology has embraced a cross-cultural perspective (Bago et al, 2022). Which earlier findings from mostly Western cultures will extend to other cultures? And why do some but not others extend? Answering these questions is key to understanding the cognitive architecture that underpins moral responses (judgments, feelings, and behaviours). Building on the insight that both fast and slow processes can guide moral responses, much of this research has used cross-cultural comparisons to test the influential dual process theory. But, as standardly formulated, the dual process theory itself is based upon intuitions about morality derived from the Western philosophical tradition. We believe that a cross-cultural perspective presents a hitherto missed opportunity to reconsider these intuitions. We propose to develop and test a revised theory. To this end, we will synthesise theoretical and empirical research conducted within and across cultures on the dual process theory; catalogue the cultural factors thought to explain differences in moral responses; generate predictions about how fast or slow moral processes interact with culture; and test these predictions through 4 studies using qualitative and quantitative methods with participants from 6 regions.

Project Description:

If our aim is to understand cultural diversity in morality, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to hesitate before fully adopting the dominant dual process theory. First, the moral systems at the basis of this theory (deontology and utilitarianism) are products of a Western philosophical tradition. Second, the dominant idea that only slow processes are utilitarian conflicts with the idea from evolutionary theory that even cognitively simpler organisms (in whom fast cognitive processes would predominate) do act in accordance with utilitarian principles insofar as doing so enhances the fitness of their kin (Kurzban et al, 2012). Finally, empirical results have not provided clear evidence to support the theory even within Western cultures—for example, Bago and De Neys (2019) did not find evidence to support the prediction that when given more time to reflect, people would be more likely to switch from deontological judgements than vice versa, and Rosas & Aguilar-Pardo (2020) found that time pressure increased utilitarian judgments.

Thus, rather than using cross-cultural data to test the currently predominant dual process theory, we believe that a more open-minded approach to cross-cultural comparisons has the potential to guide reformulation of the dual process theory. Our research plan is as follows:

Step 1: Review and synthesise research conducted within and across cultures on the dual process theory—in relation to moral cognition as well as number cognition and mindreading. This will enable us to formulate principles about what likely distinguishes fast from slow moral processes.

Step 2: Catalogue the cultural factors that have been hypothesized to explain differences in moral responses. In so doing we will draw on existing cross-cultural research including Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al, 2019) as well as ethnographic sources (Heintz, 2009).

Step 3: Using mixed qualitative-quantitative methods, we will conduct 2 small-scale studies (600 participants each) in 6 locations to establish which findings extend to other cultures. The 6 locations are urban and rural regions of Italy, Java and Bali; chosen to contrast social organisation, family structure and religion. In Study 1, we will use existing moral dilemmas and first ask people to make a judgement quickly, then allow them to consider the scenario in greater detail and to ask for more information, and then to change their response if desired (following Bago & Neys, 2019). In Study 2, we will take the same approach to replicating cross-culturally another successful study which compares deliberative with fast responses between subjects (Rosas & Aguilar-Pardo, 2020 Study 3). For both studies, we conduct follow-up interviews with subsets of participants, posing open-ended questions (E.g. What other information would they want to have? What alternative actions or punishments would they consider appropriate? What are central examples of moral dilemmas from their own lives or those of others in the culture?).

Step 4: Using the results from Studies 1 and 2 (Step 3), we will propose a revised dual process theory of the cognitive and motivational architecture underpinning moral responses, which identifies key cultural parameters influencing moral responses, and illuminates how these factors modulate cognitive processes. We will then generate predictions about cross-cultural differences in fast and slow moral reasoning processes.

Step 5: To test these predictions we will carry out 2 studies using qualitative and quantitative methods with 6000 participants from 6 locations (again, urban and rural regions of Italy, Java and Bali). These studies will involve paradigms we design to obtain a rich picture of the cross-cultural differences at various stages of moral cognition (eg, What information do participants consider relevant? At what stages of decision-making do they process this information?) We will use the results to evaluate and revise the theory.

Project Description Attachment:

Statement of Significance:

The cross-cultural perspective recently embraced by researchers in moral psychology is important. The hope is that this perspective will illuminate those positive aspects of human nature which support our twin abilities to respond ethically and to recognise ethical responses in others. These twin abilities are fundamental to any cooperative society.

Our proposed contribution is motivated by the observation that while participants are increasingly drawn from diverse groups, the philosophical foundations of a dominant theory used to interpret findings are limited insofar as they come from a single tradition. Indeed, the dominant dual process theory used in cross-cultural research is founded on intuitions about morality derived from the Western philosophical tradition. In order to develop an informed theory of the cognitive architecture underpinning moral responses, a more open-minded approach to cultural diversity is needed: our aim is to meet this need.

Meeting this need is urgent because many studies are already underway. Lacking a theory whose foundations are informed by multiple perspectives, researchers can only either rely on a potentially flawed dual process theory or else abandon the insight that both fast and slow processes can guide moral responses.

Outputs:

3 journal articles: 2 reporting empirical findings pertaining to cultural differences in moral cognition; 1 major theoretical paper (targeting Psychological Review or BBS) presenting a review and cross-cultural approach to dual process theories of moral cognition.

We will hold an intensive week-long workshop in Indoneisa involving the project leaders, local collaborators and invited keynotes, in order to discuss the interpretation of our findings, to adjust experimental designs in light of our findings.

We will present findings at conferences in cognitive science and philosophy, and disseminate them on a dedicated project website as well as on Twitter.

Outcomes:

We will provide a principled, and cross-culturally informed, reformulation of dual process theory. This reformulated theory will give direction to future research on moral cognition, enabling researchers to exploit the insight that both fast and slow processes can guide moral responses without relying on intuitions drawn exclusively from a single philosophical tradition. It will thereby enable us to understand systematic variance in moral responses (judgments, feelings, and behaviours) across cultures, and to illuminate how different forms or aspects of morality are cultivated and maintained in different cultural contexts.

We will develop and submit an ERC Synergy Grant proposal for funding for a larger project to systematically test the theory developed here in a broad range of cultural contexts.

Through working on designing studies, collecting data and interpreting findings with the UK, Italian and Indonesian teams, we will cultivate our network of collaborators and institutions to enable us to advance cross-cultural research on moral responses. A workshop and disseminating the findings at conferences will also allow us to make informal connections with other researchers and potential future

collaborators.

Capacity for Success:

The Philosophy Department at the University of Warwick will host the project. They provide an interdisciplinary setting in which economists, psychologists, and philosophers work together to understand joint action, the nature of institutions and related issues. The primary investigator, Stephen Butterfill, has not previously led such a large interdisciplinary project but has an extensive track-record of interdisciplinary collaborations. The co-investigator John Michael has recently concluded a large-scale project on the sense of commitment funded by a prestigious Starting Grant from the European Research Council, and accordingly has the relevant experience to mentor the PI in leading the project The additional co-investigator Elisabeth Schroeder-Butterfill has led a series of large-scale projects in Indonesia funded by the Welcome Trust and the UK's ESRC. Between the project team, they have the skills to lead a large interdisciplinary project.

In addition, the project will benefit from a network of long-term trusted collaborators in Milan (Sinigaglia) and Yogyakarta (Kutanegara). At each of these locations, the relevant collaborator has experience carrying out cross-cultural research and access to participants as well as research infrastructure.

Relation to Sir John Templeton's Donor Intent:

The research proposed here falls squarely within Sir John Templeton's mission to increase our understanding of human nature, and in particular positive aspects of human nature which support ethical abilities. The ability to think and act ethically, and to recognise ethical responses in others, is a foundational component of any human society.

Further, Sir John Templeton was committed to transcending cultural as well as disciplinary barriers and fostering communication and synthesis among diverse viewpoints. The cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach taken here is inspired by that commitment.

Project Relationship to Previous Grants: No
Proposed Project Start Date: 09/01/2023
Proposed Project End Date: 05/31/2026

Personnel

Primary Contact Information

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Project Leader

Project Leader Status: The Primary Contact is the Project Leader

Project Leader's CV/Resume Upload: CV 2022-08 BUTTERFILL.pdf

Project Co-Leader

Project Co-Leader Status: The Project Co-Leader is different from the Primary Contact

Project Co-Leader Contact Information

Prefix: Professor
First Name/Given Name: John
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Phone Number: 0039 3476557242

Project Co-Leader's CV/Resume Upload: John Michael CV AUGUST_2022.docx

To the best of your knowledge, is the Project Leader or Project Co-Leader a JTF Trustee, Officer or staff member or related to a JTF Trustee, Officer or staff member as a spouse, sibling, child, or parent?: No
Additional Personnel:

Dr Elisabeth Mary Schroeder-Butterfill, Associate Professor, University of Southampton will be an additional co-leader as she has expertise on fieldwork in Indoensia.

History with the Foundation:

I know about the foundation's work through its support for projects run by other philosophers, particularly Tim Crane and Edouard Machery who have led large grants.

Organization

Applicant Country & Area: United Kingdom
Organization Name: University of Warwick, UK
Also Known As:
Did this organization receive 50% or more of its annual funding in any one of the last three years from any combination of the John Templeton Foundation, Templeton World Charity Foundation or Templeton Religion Trust?: No

Budget

In what currency are you requesting support from the Foundation?: GBP
Request Amount: 140657
Total Project Amount: 140657
Brief Budget explanation and Sources of Additional Funding:

1. People (£60,013 total), breakdown:

1.1 £25,747 : The PI will do the basic research (Steps 1, 2 & 3 above), design and lead the studies (Steps 3 & 5), present the findings and write papers.

1.2 £34,266 : Research assistants at local universities to assist in: preparation of materials & translation; participant recruitment; testing; follow-up interviews. Allow 260 hours (~7 weeks) plus travel and equipment for each of 6 regions, average £5,711 per region.

2 Payment to participants and recruitment costs (£46,080 total), breakdown:

 2.1 £6,000 : Smaller-scale studies: 2 studies * 100 participants (Pp) * 6 regions. Average £5/participant (more in rural, less in urban regions).

 2.2 £2,880 : Follow-up small group interviews 2 * 24 Pp * 6 regions. £10/participant.

 2.3 £30,000 : Larger-scale studies: 2 * 500 Pp * 6 regions. £5/participant.

 2.4 £7200 : Follow-up small group interviews: 2 * 60 Pp * 6 regions. £10/participant.

3. £12,450 : Workshop in Indonesia involving the project leaders as well as experts from the UK, Indonesia and other countries.

4. Other Travel £4,000. Team will meet in Dec 2023 to agree experimental designs, RA training needs and administration.

5. Overheads (13%) £18,114