**Can We Better Understand Moral Cognition through Cultural Differences?**

Duration: 33 months

Start Date: September 1st, 2023

Funding Area: Character Virtue Development

Department: Character Virtue Development

**Executive Summary (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

Recent research in moral psychology has embraced a cross-cultural perspective. Investigating which findings from mostly Western cultures extend to other cultures allows testing theories about the cognitive and motivational mechanisms that underpin moral responses—judgments, feelings, and behaviours. Building on the insight that moral cognition can be *fast* or *slow*, much of this research has used cross-cultural comparisons to test whether the influential dual process theory explains results across cultures. 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 the intuitions behind the dual process theory as standardly formulated. We propose to develop—and test—a more informed theory of the cognitive architecture of morality. To this end, we will: review and 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; and generate predictions about how fast or slow moral processes interact with culture. To test these predictions we will carry out four pilot and two main experiments with participants from 6 regions.

**Project Description (max 4000 characters including spaces)**

[to follow]

**Statement of Significance (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

[to follow]

**Outputs (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

* 3 journal articles: 2 reporting empirical findings on how cultural differences enable us to better understand 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 two intensive weeklong workshops (one in each country), involving the project leaders and local collaborators, 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 (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

[to follow]

**Capacity for Success (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

The Philosophy Department at the University of Warwick will host the project. They provide an interdisciplinary setting in which economists, cognitive neuroscientists, and philosophers work together to understand joint action, the nature of institutions and related issues. 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 leading a team of researchers working on this topic. In addition, the project will benefit from a network of long-term trusted collaborators in Milan (Sinigaglia), Argentina (Ramenzoni), and Indonesia (\*\*\***TBC**). 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 (max 1300 characters including spaces)**

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 cooperation. 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.

**Resources**

**Total: 174,432**

**Experiments and dissemination** (**£139,680**).

Participant numbers are based on <50%

Sample sizes will be determined based on effect sizes observed in the pilot studies and in the published studies on which they are based.

1. Research assistants will be employed at local universities to assist in: preparation of materials including translation; recruitment of participants; testing; and follow-up interviews. We estimate that allowing 400 hours (~10 weeks) plus travel and equipment for each of the six regions region would cost an average of £9,000 per region (**£54,000)**
2. Smaller-scale studies will include 50 participants in each of 6 regions (600 participants). Payment to participants plus recruitment\* costs will average £8 per participant (£2,400 per pilot; 4 studies: **£9,600**).
3. Follow-up small group interviews with selected participants (12 per region, 72 participants) will be done by local research assistants in each region. £10 per participant (£720 per pilot; 4 pilot studies: **£2,880**).
4. Each larger-scale study will include 500 participants in each of 6 regions (6000 participants). We estimate that participant costs (payments plus recruitment\*) will average £8 per participant per study (£24,000 per study; 2 studies: **£48,000**).
5. After each study, follow-up small group interviews with selected participants (60 per region, 360 participants) will be done by local research assistants in each region. £10 per participant (£3600per study; 2 studies: **£7200**).
6. 1 week-long workshop in the UK (**£11,000**) and 1 in Indonesia (**£7,000**) involving the project leaders as well as experts from the UK, Indonesia and other countries in both locations.

Other Travel expenses (**£8,000**).

Publication costs (**£4,000**)

Overheads (15%): (**£22,752**)

\*We estimate that participant costs will be much greater in rural than urban regions and will require research assistants to quite travel widely.