A photograph of a person's arm and hand reaching upwards from the surface of the ocean. The hand is open, palm facing forward. The background is a vast, cloudy sky over the horizon.

DEFINING AND MEASURING MORALITY

Week 1 - Moral Psychology

WEEK 1

In the first week, after a review of the syllabus, we will be exploring how philosophers and scientists have understood and measured morality.

In week 1:

- How will the course be structured?
- How will my learning be assessed?
- How has morality been understood and defined?
- How do scientists measure morality?

MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Individuals develop variable and sometimes even opposing intuitions about what themselves and others should and should never do. **Moral psychology** is the scientific study of how individuals judge behaviors and character traits as right or wrong/ good or bad, and act (or fail to act) in virtuous ways. In this course, we will explore questions like:

- How do we come to the conclusion that a behavior is wrong?
- How do we judge if someone else is a good or bad person?
- How do we lie, cheat, steal, and hurt others with a clear conscience?
- Why do different groups of people come to different conclusions about what is right?
- How do we persuade others to reconsider their stance on moral issues?

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

- Week 1-2: introduction, measurement, evolution, and development
- Weeks 3-8: moral reasoning, moral judgments, moral behavior, moral emotions, and the moral self
- Weeks 9-10: applications of moral psychology (politics, religion, the law)

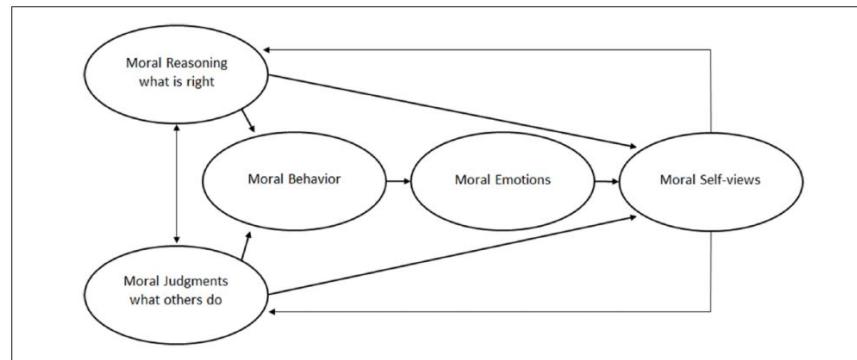


Figure 1. The psychology of morality: connections between five research themes.

ASSIGNMENTS

Your course grade will be determined by the following assignments:

Assignment	Points
Midterm exam	100 points
Final paper	100 points
Quizzes (25 points x4)	100 points
Homework (20 points x4)	80 points
Participation	20 points
	= 400 points

EXAMS

- The sit-down midterm exam is scheduled for **the sixth week** of the course. The exam will consist of matching, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and short answer questions.
- The final research paper will be due during **finals week**. You will choose a research question to explore from a list of topics.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

- Every Sunday, there will be an assignment due on Canvas at **11:59pm**
- The assignments will alternate between quizzes and structured homework assignments

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

While studying moral psychology, we are bound to hear from others who do not agree with our moral values. I do not expect to agree with you on everything, and I do not expect you to agree with your classmates on everything. We are a group with diverse backgrounds and experiences. We must therefore make it a priority that everyone in this class have the opportunity to offer their ideas, hear one another's ideas, and make arguments and challenge ideas.

That being said, if you do not feel comfortable participating in a class discussion or believe there is more that I could be doing to promote a more effective learning environment, I urge you to come talk to me. I will always listen to your concerns with respect and an open mind and will make adjustments when appropriate.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Some important ground rules:

1. Criticize ideas and not people
2. Avoid making assumptions about others
3. Allow others to make mistakes and learn from them
4. Keep an open mind - don't assume your beliefs are fully formed and that you can't learn from others
5. Treat others with respect, even when you disagree

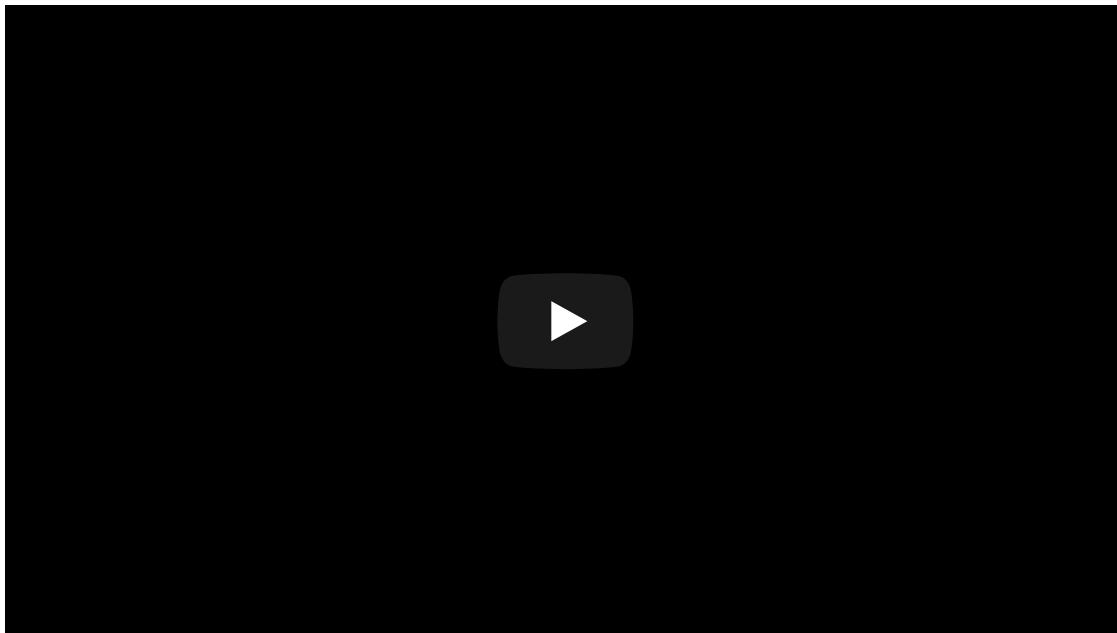
COURSE WEBSITE

- www.sdimakis.github.io/moral_psychology
- Course content, syllabus, readings, lectures, and assignments are all posted here

Any questions?

Let's get started!

THE GOOD PLACE: HOW YOUR LIFE IS SCORED



The Good Place is a TV series set in the afterlife. In the show, when you die, if you've been a 'good person' you go to the Good Place, and if you've been a 'bad person', you go to the Bad Place. This is a clip from the first episode where the characters are introduced to how their goodness was determined.

THE GOOD PLACE'S MORAL CLAIMS

1. All behavior is "good" or "bad"
2. Some actions are more "bad" than others
3. Behavior can be assigned an objective moral score

WHICH ACTIONS ARE "GOOD"?

Let's test these claims. On a piece of paper, order the following actions from right to wrong. Once you're done, compare your rank order with your neighbor(s) and note any disagreements.

- Donating to a charity.
- Developing a vaccine.
- Leaving a restaurant without tipping a waitress.
- Helping your friend.
- Eating a chicken sandwich.

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Discussion question: what did you disagree on and why?

WHAT PEOPLE THINK IS "MORAL" VARIES

Actions

- Donating to a charity.
- Developing a vaccine.
- Leaving a restaurant without tipping a waitress.
- Helping your friend.
- Eating a chicken sandwich.

Source of variability

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Source of variability

- Intentions or consequences

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- Beliefs

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Source of variability

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- Beliefs
- Culture

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- Intentions or consequences
- Beliefs
- Culture
- Context

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- Eating a chicken sandwich.

Source of variability

- Intentions or consequences
- Beliefs
- Culture
- Context
- Who deserves moral concern

DEFINING MORALITY

Definitions of morality are either **descriptive** or **normative**

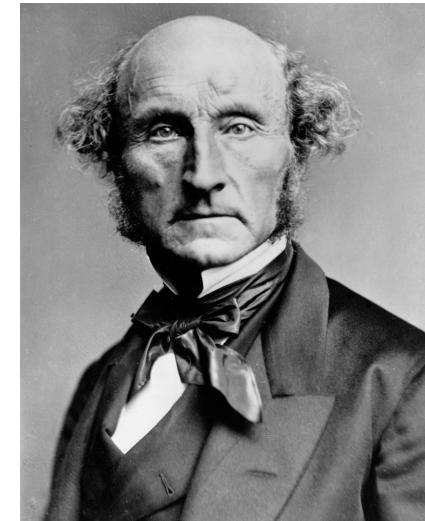
- **Normative:** morality is a code of conduct that would be agreed upon by all "rational" persons
 - Morality is shared beliefs about how we *ought* to act
 - Morality is like it has been defined by writers of The Good Place
 - Normative theories assume that philosophers can ultimately, through reasoning, determine which behaviors are good and which are bad

NORMATIVE DEFINITIONS OF MORALITY

Utilitarianism is the *normative* moral theory that an action is morally right if it **benefits the most people**.

- Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory, meaning that it focuses on the consequences of the action.

"[Morality can be defined as...] the rules and precepts for human conduct, by the observance of which [a happy existence] might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind.



John Stuart Mill,
Philosopher

-John Stuart Mill, 1861

NORMATIVE DEFINITIONS OF MORALITY

Deontology is the *normative moral* theory that the determination that an action is right or wrong should depend on **a set of predetermined rules**, rather than on the consequences of the action.

"A lie always harms another; if not some human being, then it nevertheless does harm to humanity in general, inasmuch as it vitiates the very source of right."

-Immanuel Kant



Immanuel Kant,
Philosopher

A MORAL DILEMMA

What *ought* you do in this scenario?

You are a doctor. You have five patients, each of whom is about to die due to a failing organ of some kind. A new person is rushed into the hospital after a serious car accident. This person is critically injured, and will die without immediate surgery. It is likely you can save this accident victim, though it would involve long and complicated surgery. You realize that if you purposely cut his carotid artery during surgery it would cause his death and no one would ever know. Then you could harvest his organs for transplant into the bodies of the other five patients. If you do this, the other five patients will live, but the accident victim will die. Is it appropriate for you to kill the accident victim in order to save your five patients?

UTILITARIANISM VS. DEONTOLOGY

Utilitarians and deontologists are sometimes in conflict about what they agree is right. For example,

- A utilitarian, who says that we should **increase the utility for the most amount of people**, may argue that the surgeon ought to save the lives of the five by harvesting the organs of the one.
- A deontologist, who relies **on predetermined rules** to decide what is moral, may argue that it is never okay to violate a person's right to life, regardless of the consequences. Thus, there is a predetermined rule that says that we cannot sacrifice a human life for the greater good.

These theories often don't capture how people really think about morality

DEFINING MORALITY

Definitions of morality are either **descriptive** or **normative**

- **Normative:** morality is a code of conduct that would be agreed upon by all "rational" persons
- **Descriptive:** morality is a system of morals that are endorsed by an individual or a group
 - Morality is whatever a group or individual thinks is moral
 - E.g., Catholic morality, Democrat morality, Nazi morality

DEFINING MORALITY

Definitions of morality are either **descriptive** or **normative**

- **Normative:** morality is a code of conduct that would be agreed upon by all "rational" persons
- **Descriptive:** morality is a system of morals that are endorsed by an individual or a group

Most of our normative theories come from philosophers, who have long debated what people *ought* to think is moral. Most of our descriptive theories of morality come from anthropologists and psychologists, who describe the moral systems endorsed by groups of people or cultures

- Descriptive definitions allow for different people or groups to come to different conclusions about what is moral

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

A good descriptive theory of morality needs to account for meaningful differences that arise within and between populations of individuals

- It should be able to describe why one sibling is "pro-life" and the other "pro-choice", and why some cultures endorse "honor killings" while others find the practice abhorrent

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

1. Moral foundations theory
2. Morality is care/harm
3. The model of moral motives
4. Relationship regulation theory
5. Circles of moral concern

MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY (MFT)

Haidt has taken a **functionalist** approaches to defining morality, meaning that he describes something as moral if it fulfills a particular *function*.

"Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to **suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperative social life possible.**"



Jonathan Haidt, Social Psychologist

-Jonathan Haidt, 2010

MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY (MFT)

- Haidt proposed **moral foundations theory**, which posits that there are (at least) five moral intuitions. Individuals vary in how much they are willing to endorse or prioritize their moral intuitions
 - **Harm/care** - We should care for and not harm vulnerable others.
 - **Fairness/cheating** - We should get back what we put forward; we should not cheat.
 - **Ingroup/ betrayal** - We should be loyal to our groups (e.g., family, nation).
 - **Authority/ subversion** - We should respect authority and tradition.
 - **Purity/ Degradation** - We should not violate norms of decency and purity by doing certain things with our bodies.

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A candidate for a 6th intuition:

- **Liberty/ Oppression** - People should not restrict the freedom of others.

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

1. Moral foundations theory
2. **Morality is care/harm**
3. The model of moral motives
4. Relationship regulation theory
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MORALITY IS CARE/HARM

However, some psychologists argue that all foundations can be mapped onto a single harm principle, e.g., authority provides a way to reduce conflict peacefully, purity provides a way to reduce harm from diseases.

Meaningful differences arise when individuals disagree about which actions are harmful.

"Morality is essentially represented by a cognitive template that combines a **perceived intentional agent** with a **perceived suffering patient**."

-Kurt Gray and colleagues, 2012



Kurt Gray, Social Psychologist

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

1. Moral foundations theory
2. Morality is care/harm
3. **The model of moral motives**
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THE MODEL OF MORAL MOTIVES (THE MMM)

Janoff-Bulman theorizes that morality requires us to regulate our behavior; it requires us to overcome temptations or desires to cheat, lie, and steal, and to be motivated to do good. She argues that MFT is an incomplete framework.

"Morality is generally recognized as a system of rules that facilitate and coordinate group living; as such it involves behavioral regulation so as to optimize our existence as social beings."

-Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013



Ronnie Janoff-Bulman,
Social Psychologist

THE MODEL OF MORAL MOTIVES (THE MMM)

- Janoff-Bulman proposed that all moral motives can be classified by the two **motivational systems** (approach or avoid) and the **focus of moral concern** (the self, another person, or the group)
 - **Motivational systems:** our approach motivational system designates moral beliefs about what we *ought to do* (called prescriptive morality) and our avoidance motivational system designates moral beliefs about what we *ought not to do* (called proscriptive morality)
 - **Focus of moral concern:** we have moral beliefs concerning what is virtuous for the self, for another person, and for the group

THE MODEL OF MORAL MOTIVES (THE MMM)

- The 2x3 MMM theorizes that moral motives can be classified as a motive to provide for the self, provide for another person, provide for the group (prescriptive regulation), or a motive to protect the self, protect another person, or protect the group (proscriptive regulation)
 - For example, a moral motive of protecting another person would yield a decision to not steal

	Self (personal)	Other (interpersonal)	Group (collective)
Protect/ Inhibition (proscriptive regulation)	self-restraint/ moderation	not harming	social order/ communal solidarity
Provide/ Activation (prescriptive regulation)	industriousness	helping/ fairness	social justice/ communal responsibility

Figure 1. Model of moral motives.

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

1. Moral foundations theory
2. Morality is care/harm
3. The model of moral motives
4. **Relationship regulation theory**
5. Circles of moral concern

RELATIONSHIP REGULATION THEORY OF MORALITY

Rai also believes that MFT does not fully capture the scope of moral disagreements. He argues that the determination of if an action is right cannot be determined outside of its social-relational context.

"We must reconceptualize moral psychology as **embedded in our social-relational cognition**, such that moral judgments and behaviors emerge out of the specific obligations and transgressions entailed by particular types of social relationships."

-Rai & Fiske, 2011



Tage Rai,
Social Psychologist

RELATIONSHIP REGULATION THEORY OF MORALITY

- According to relational models theory, there are four types of mental models for relationships:
 - **Communal sharing:** individuals treat each other as equivalent, give and receive according to need, long term, e.g., families, teams
 - **Authority ranking:** individuals are ranked along a social dimension, those who are higher in rank must protect those lower in rank, e.g., adults and children, military officers and soldiers
 - **Equality matching:** relationship based on balance and reciprocity, requires record keeping to know what has been exchanged, turn-based, e.g., exchanging Christmas cards
 - **Market pricing:** based on proportionality, each person gets what they deserve, e.g., buying and selling

RELATIONSHIP REGULATION THEORY OF MORALITY

- Relationship regulation theory posits that social-relational context is necessary for understanding beliefs about what is moral or immoral
- Cultural differences or meaningful differences in a population can arise when there are disagreements about which relational model is appropriate
 - For example, one might perceive a family charging their child for rent as unethical if they believe a family relationship should be a communal sharing one (not a market pricing one)
 - **Discussion question:** what is another moral disagreement that may arise from differences in relational models?

FIVE DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES OF MORALITY

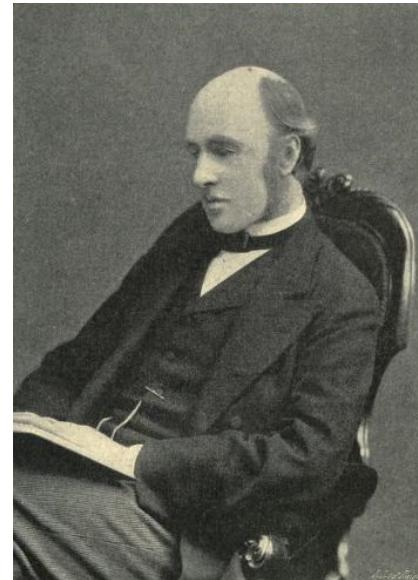
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CIRCLES OF MORAL CONCERN

Others argue that meaningful differences arise when people differ in who they are concerned about. This idea was first theorized by W.E.H. Lecky and then later popularized by modern philosopher Peter Singer.

"At one time the benevolent affections embrace merely the family, soon the circle expanding includes first a class, then a nation, then a coalition of nations, then all humanity and finally, its influence is felt in the dealings of man with the animal world."

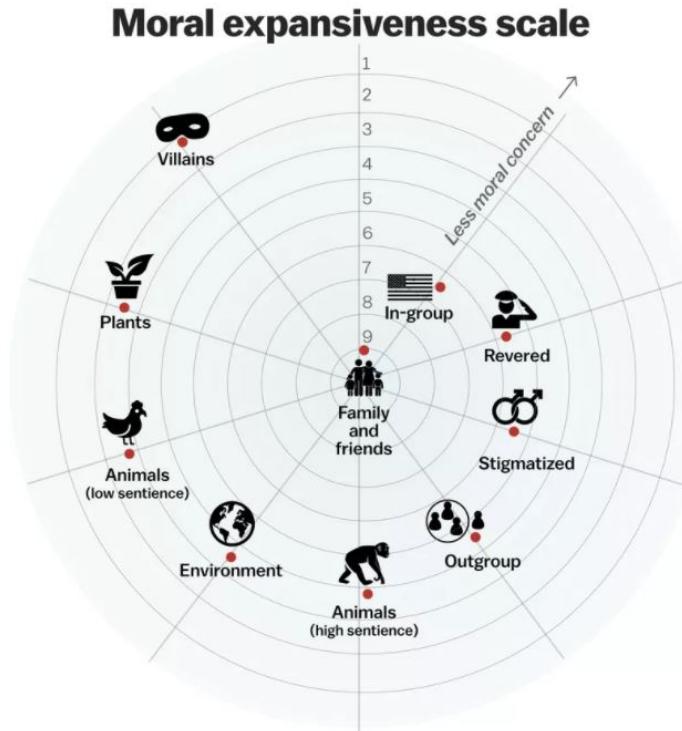
W.E.H. Lecky, 1869



W.E.H. Lecky
Historian, philosopher

CIRCLES OF MORAL CONCERN

- Psychologists have found that individuals differ in who they have moral concerns for
- For example, children are more egocentric and many vegetarians/vegans have higher moral concern for animals than meat-eaters do



SOURCE: Diagram from "Moral Expansiveness: Examining variability in the extension of the moral world," by Daniel Crighton, Matthew J. Hornsey, Paul G. Bain, and Brock Bastian. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Vox

A WORKING DEFINITION OF MORALITY

To summarize:

- Morality pertains to how we ought to behave (and also how we think we ought to behave, which varies from individual to individual)
- We may have evolved moral intuitions regarding harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity
- Moral violations most often involve an intentional agent and a suffering victim
- Being moral often requires us to regulate selfish desires; we have moral rules about what we should do and what we should never do
- Morality cannot be understood without taking into account the context in which the action takes place
- People differ in who their moral concerns apply to

MEASURING MORALITY

Psychologists generally measure morality through...

1. Self-report of behaviors or traits
2. Hypothetical moral dilemmas
3. Endorsement of abstract moral rules
4. Position on specific moral issues
5. Behavior

SELF-REPORT OF BEHAVIORS OR TRAITS

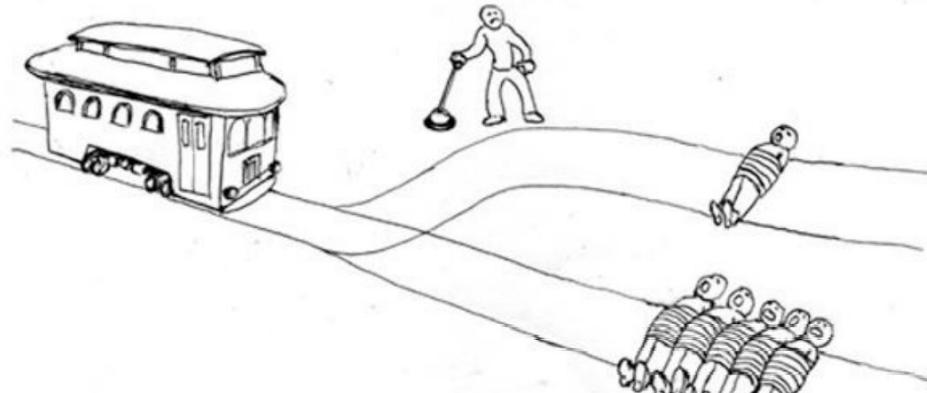
- An example of a self-report measure of morality would be The HEXACO Personality Inventory **Honesty-Humility subscale**
- Individuals who score high on Honesty-Humility say that they don't manipulate others for personal gain and feel little temptation to break rules

Example items on the scale:

1. If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it. (R)
2. I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it. (R)

HYPOTHETICAL MORAL DILEMMAS

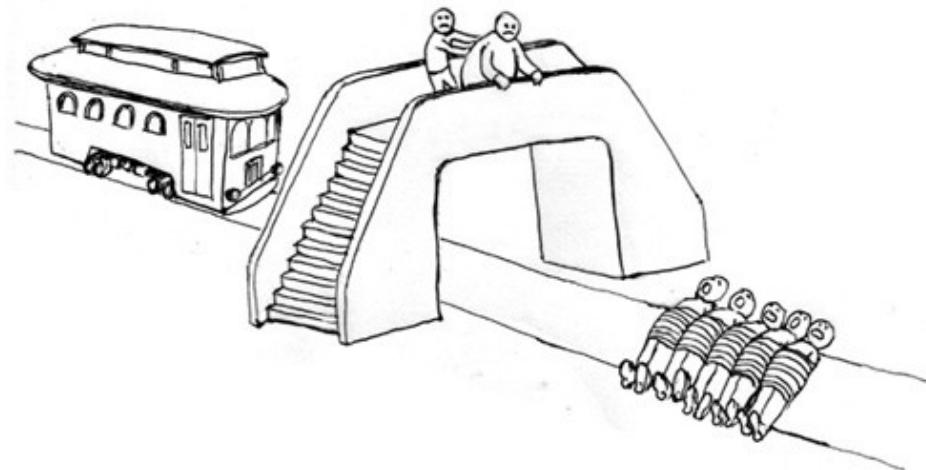
A runaway trolley is headed for five people who will be killed if it proceeds on its present course. The only way to save them is to hit a switch that will turn the trolley onto an alternate set of tracks where it will kill one person instead of five. Should you turn the trolley in order to save five people at the expense of one?



Thomson (1976)

HYPOTHETICAL MORAL DILEMMAS

A trolley threatens to kill five people. You are standing next to a large stranger on a footbridge that spans the tracks, in between the oncoming trolley and the five people. In this scenario, the only way to save the five people is to push this stranger off the bridge, onto the tracks below. He will die if you do this, but his body will stop the trolley from reaching the others. In order to save the five others, should you push this stranger to his death?



Thomson (1976)

HYPOTHETICAL MORAL DILEMMAS

- Nearly everyone concludes that it is acceptable to sacrifice one life for five in the switch case but not in the footbridge case
- In both cases, we are sacrificing one person for five, but they lead to different answers
- We can study responses to hypothetical dilemmas like these to understand how we make moral decisions

ABSTRACT MORAL RULES

- We can also measure how likely individuals are to endorse abstract principles.
- For example, Haidt's **moral foundations theory** proposes that there are (at least) five moral intuitions
 - **Harm/care** - We should care for and not harm vulnerable others.
 - **Fairness/cheating** - We should get back what we put forward; we should not cheat.
 - **Ingroup/ betrayal** - We should be loyal to our groups (e.g., family, nation).
 - **Authority/ subversion** - We should respect authority and tradition.
 - **Purity/ Degradation** - We should not violate norms of decency and purity by doing certain things with our bodies.

ABSTRACT MORAL RULES

Foundation	Definition	MFQ30 Item
Care/ Harm	Do not harm.	"It can never be right to kill a human being."
Fairness/ Cheating	Treat others fairly.	"I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing."
Ingroup/ Betrayal	Be loyal.	"People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong."
Authority/ Subversion	Respect authority and tradition.	"If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty."
Purity/ Degradation	Do not violate purity norms.	"People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed."

POSITION ON SPECIFIC MORAL ISSUES

- We can give participants scales inquiring information about their position on specific moral issues
 - "Do you think abortion is wrong?"
 - "Do you think it is immoral to eat meat?"

BEHAVIORAL MEASURES

Psychologists can manipulate situations in a lab and measure whether the participants acting morally or immorally

- **The dictator game:** participants in a lab experiment are paired up. One player is randomly assigned to be the "dictator." The "dictator" can give the other player as much money as they want. Researchers measure how much money the "dictator" gives away.
- Participants are given a task to do that earns them money. At the end, the researcher asks if the participant would be willing to donate some of their earnings. The researcher records how much money is donated.

BEHAVIORAL MEASURES

Psychologists can also try to measure moral behavior in naturalistic settings

- Researchers leave wallets across the country with a return address. They measure how many wallets get returned.

SUMMARY

- There are many ways that psychologists have studied moral thinking and behavior. They have...
 - Asked individuals about their character traits
 - Asked individuals if they endorse abstract principles
 - Asked individuals if they believe specific acts are right or wrong
 - Tested moral decisions in hypothetical moral situations
 - Measured moral/immoral behavior in a laboratory (e.g., economic games) and in naturalistic settings (e.g., wallets) by designing creative experiments