

Abstract



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Contextual Factors in Moral Judgment and Decision Making

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Morality refers to codes of conduct prescribed by society, state, or religion. Over the ages, morality has served an important functional role in the social lives of people, often guiding the distinction between right and wrong, permissible and impermissible, and justice and interpersonal expectations. Moral situations produce 'victims' and 'agents.' An agent is the perpetrator of 'action' while a victim is the recipient of the agent's action. The nature of the interaction between a victim and an agent determines the perceived morality of the action. If action is 'personal' through 'physical contact' the action is deemed to be immoral, whereas if the action is 'impersonal' and lacks physical contact, it is



deemed morally permissible. If the agent helps the victim at ‘personal material cost’ the action is deemed moral, while if an agent harms the victim for ‘personal material gain’ the action is deemed immoral. If the decision to act was ‘quick’ indicating little evaluation or ‘slow’ indicating comparatively detailed evaluation process. However, most of this research has been studied in decision silos, and little research has been conducted to understand how contextual factors modulate moral decisions and their judgments. In this thesis, I hypothesized that contextual factors, specifically economic context will influence moral decisions and judgments. I investigated this hypothesis in 3 studies and found that, first, proceeding economic decisions increase the probability of utilitarian choices in tragic moral scenarios. Second, I found that economic inequality increases the probability of trading-off moral value against the economic value in deprived individuals. Third, I found that the economic status of the moral/immoral agent influences the judgment of character by observers.

Keywords: Moral decisions, Economic context, Utilitarian, Deontology, Moral/Material value, Moral/Material Cost, Decision speed.