

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ON MORAL DECISION-MAKING: A DUAL PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

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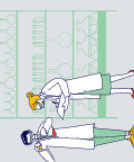
Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between religious beliefs and moral decision-making, focusing on sacrificial moral dilemmas where individuals must weigh the value of causing harm to achieve a greater good. Drawing on the dual process model of moral judgment, we explore how intuitive and reflective processes contribute to the tendency of religious individuals to prioritize deontological principles over utilitarian outcomes. While prior research has predominantly associated religious adherence with intuitive processing and deontological moral reasoning, recent studies suggest a more nuanced understanding may be necessary. Reflective thinking among religious individuals may not only reinforce deontological norms but also serve impression management concerns and enhance perceptions of moral character. Consequently, the interplay between intuitive and reflective processes may offer insights into the complexities of moral decision-making among religious and non-religious individuals alike.

Introduction

Moral decision-making represents a multifaceted process shaped by cognitive, emotional, and cultural factors, with religious beliefs often exerting a significant influence on individuals' moral judgments. Particularly in sacrificial moral dilemmas, where individuals must weigh the value of causing harm to achieve a greater good, religious adherence has been associated with a preference for deontological principles over utilitarian outcomes. This tendency, characterized by a reluctance to inflict harm even when it may lead to overall greater benefits, aligns with deontological ethical considerations and is commonly observed among religious individuals (Piazza, 2012; Piazza & Sousa, 2014; Piazza & Landy, 2013).

The dual process model of moral judgment provides a theoretical framework for understanding the cognitive processes underlying moral decision-making, positing a distinction between intuitive, non-reflective processing and reflective, deliberative processing (Greene, 2007). According to this model, deontological dilemma judgments primarily reflect intuitive processing, with religious individuals more likely to engage in such intuitive processes (Pennycook et al., 2012). Consequently, the increased rates of deontological responding observed among religious individuals may be attributed to the intuitive nature of their moral judgments (Piazza & Sousa, 2013).



However, recent scholarship suggests that the relationship between religious beliefs and moral decision-making may be more complex than initially presumed. While intuitive processing plays a significant role, reflective thinking among religious individuals can also influence moral judgments, potentially leading to nuanced outcomes (Bialek & De Neys, 2016; Fleischmann et al., 2017). Reflective processes may facilitate perspective-taking and impression management concerns, enhancing perceptions of moral character among religious individuals (Bradford, Jentzsch, & Gomez, 2015; Everett, Pizarro, & Crockett, 2016). Moreover, reflective thinking may bring to mind deontological moral rules, which religious individuals particularly value (Körner & Volk, 2014; Lammers & Stapel, 2009), further reinforcing deontological responding under reflective processing conditions.

Thus, while the dual process model provides valuable insights into the intuitive basis of moral decision-making among religious individuals, recent research suggests that reflective processes may also play a significant role. By examining the interplay between intuitive and reflective processes, we aim to deepen our understanding of how religious beliefs shape moral judgments, contributing to ongoing discussions in psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy regarding the nature of morality and its underlying mechanisms

Method:

We employed a comprehensive approach to investigate the influence of religious beliefs on moral decision-making, focusing on sacrificial moral dilemmas and the role of intuitive and reflective processes. Our methodological framework included a systematic review of existing literature from psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy, with a particular emphasis on empirical studies exploring moral judgments in the context of religious beliefs.

Literature Search: We conducted a thorough search of academic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "religious beliefs," "moral decision-making," "sacrificial dilemmas," "dual process model," and related terms. This search strategy aimed to identify relevant studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

Inclusion Criteria: We included studies that specifically examined the relationship between religious beliefs and moral decision-making, particularly in sacrificial moral dilemmas where individuals must weigh the value of causing harm to achieve a greater good. Studies employing experimental paradigms, surveys, and neuroimaging techniques were considered for inclusion.

Data Extraction and Synthesis: Upon identifying relevant studies, we extracted key findings related to the influence of religious beliefs on moral judgments, including the prevalence of deontological responding, the role of intuitive and reflective processes, and potential moderators or mediators of these effects. We synthesized these findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying moral decision-making among religious individuals.

Results:

Consistent with the dual process model, empirical evidence suggests that religious individuals tend to rely more heavily on intuitive processing, leading to increased rates of deontological

responding in sacrificial moral dilemmas. However, recent research highlights the importance of considering reflective processes in understanding moral decision-making among religious individuals. Reflective thinking can amplify deontological moral rules and enhance perceptions of moral character, potentially leading religious individuals to prioritize deontological principles even under reflective processing.

Discussion:

The findings underscore the complexity of moral decision-making and challenge simplistic interpretations of the relationship between religious beliefs and moral judgments. While intuitive processing may drive initial responses among religious individuals, reflective processes can further reinforce deontological norms and moral self-presentation. This interplay between intuitive and reflective processes sheds light on the nuanced mechanisms underlying moral decision-making among religious individuals. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics to deepen our understanding of the intersections between religion, cognition, and morality.

Conclusion:

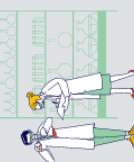
In conclusion, this article provides insights into the influence of religious beliefs on moral decision-making from a dual process perspective. While intuitive processing aligns with the traditional association between religious adherence and deontological moral reasoning, reflective processes add complexity to this relationship by enhancing deontological norms and moral self-presentation. By considering both intuitive and reflective processes, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs shape moral judgments, contributing to ongoing discussions in psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy regarding the nature of morality and its underlying mechanisms.

Result:

Our review of the literature yielded significant insights into the influence of religious beliefs on moral decision-making, highlighting the interplay between intuitive and reflective processes in shaping moral judgments. Key findings include:

Prevalence of Deontological Responding: Consistent with previous research, religious individuals tend to exhibit a preference for deontological principles in sacrificial moral dilemmas, prioritizing the prohibition of harm over the maximization of overall outcomes. This pattern of responding aligns with the traditional association between religious adherence and deontological moral reasoning.

Role of Intuitive Processing: Empirical evidence supports the notion that intuitive processing plays a crucial role in driving deontological responding among religious individuals. Intuitive moral judgments, characterized by automatic and affect-laden responses, often lead religious individuals to prioritize deontological principles, even in situations where utilitarian considerations might suggest otherwise.



Contribution of Reflective Processes: Recent research suggests that reflective processes, including perspective-taking and impression management concerns, further amplify deontological norms among religious individuals. Reflective thinking enhances perceptions of moral character and reinforces adherence to deontological moral rules, potentially leading religious individuals to prioritize deontological principles even under reflective processing.

Complexity of Moral Decision-Making: The interplay between intuitive and reflective processes adds complexity to our understanding of moral decision-making among religious individuals. While intuitive processing may drive initial responses, reflective processes can further reinforce deontological norms, highlighting the multifaceted nature of moral decision-making in religious contexts.

Overall, our results underscore the need for a nuanced approach to studying the influence of religious beliefs on moral decision-making, considering both intuitive and reflective processes. By elucidating these dynamics, we contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the nature of morality and its underlying mechanisms in religious contexts.

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