

Investigating the Associations Between Moral Objectivism and Personality Traits



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INTRODUCTION

Philosophers have often assumed that all people are morally objective. Moral objectivism is characterized by regarding moral claims as objectively true or false and applying to all people, regardless of any other factors. This assumption has not been backed by empirical evidence, so we aim to compare the trait of moral objectivism with other traits to better understand moral objectivism. Previous studies by Dr. Beebe's team have suggested that moral objectivism does not accurately characterize the views of normal humans. In this study will measure moral objectivism along with disgust sensitivity, cognitive reflection, and need for cognition. We hypothesize that those with high moral objectivity will be positively correlated with disgust sensitivity, and negatively correlated with cognitive reflection and need for cognition.

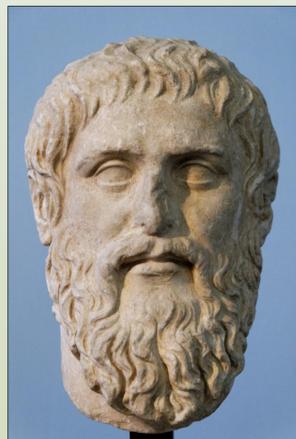
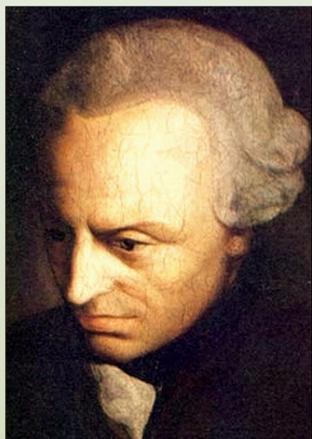


Figure 1: Both Immanuel Kant (left) and Plato (right) are two famous philosophers that assumed moral objectivity when developing their philosophical views and theories.

METHODS

To investigate the relationship between moral objectivity and various traits, we administered a survey comprised of various questionnaires to students at the University at Buffalo. UB students were recruited using departmental email list requests as well as through posted fliers throughout campus. These UB students were compensated for their time with either \$10 or \$8 of campus cash, depending on the semester the survey was given. The questionnaires in the survey measured moral objectivism, disgust sensitivity, cognitive reflection, and need for cognition.

To measure moral objectivism, a 14 question questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire poses two opposing moral viewpoints in each question, and then asks the taker to judge whether both viewpoints can be correct or if one must be wrong. If the answer that one must be wrong is chosen more often, then there is a greater amount of moral objectivity.

METHODS (cont.)

To measure disgust sensitivity, Jonathan Haidt's Disgust Sensitivity Scale was used.

To measure cognitive reflection, Shane Frederick's cognitive reflection task was used.

To measure need for cognition, Cacioppo and Petty's scale was used.

The correlation between moral objectivity and the other traits measured was found using Pearson's correlation coefficient and a simple t-test was used to measure the significance (p) of the correlation (r). A significance value of $p < .05$ was considered to be significant, and $p < .01$ to be very significant.

RESULTS

92 undergraduates participated in this study over the course of two semesters. The average age was 21 years old. 76% of participants were female, and the participants were predominantly Caucasian.

Sample Means and Standard Deviations Used

SCALE	Mean	Standard Deviation
Moral Objectivity	7.87	3.71
Disgust Sensitivity	53.93	18.21

Table 1: Shown are some of the means and standard deviations that were derived after scoring all of the participant's surveys. These were used to generate the correlations and their significance.

Correlation with Moral Objectivity

Personality Trait	Correlation (r) with moral objectivity	Significance
Disgust Sensitivity	$r = .35$	$p < .01$
Cognitive Reflection	$r = -.20$	$p = .059$
Need for Cognition	$r = .12$	$p > .05$

Table 2: Shown are the correlations derived using Pearson's correlation coefficient as well as the significance of each correlation.

As seen in Table 2, a positive correlation between disgust sensitivity and moral objectivity was seen. There was an almost significant correlation found between cognitive reflection and moral objectivity. No significant correlation was found between need for cognition and moral objectivity. In addition, no gender effects were seen ($r = .13$, $p > .05$).

CONCLUSIONS

Only one of our traits measured showed a significant correlation with moral objectivity.

- Given that at least one trait had correlation with moral objectivism, there is support that moral objectivism is not in all humans, but can possibly arise from certain world perspectives or tendencies.
- The positive correlation between moral objectivity and disgust sensitivity shows that those who believe morality is universal are also more easily disgusted. This suggests that moral objectivists are possibly more easily repulsed by those who are not in line with what they see as universal.
- The lack of correlation between cognitive reflection and need for cognition denies the suggestion that those who think more are less morally objective.

For any future directions, we would like to increase the sample size of our study so that any almost significant results can be eliminated so that it will be very clear what is and what is not related to moral objectivism. In addition, many more personality traits can be measured with respect to moral objectivity in order to further understanding of this viewpoint.

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