

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, October 10, 2016

Where: 360 JMHH

When: 12:00 – 1:15 pm

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New Evidence for Utilitarianism in Everyday Moral Judgment

ABSTRACT: When, if ever, do people apply utilitarian logic to their moral judgments? In response to recent critiques of the methods traditionally used to answer this question, I offer a new approach by investigating whether people show evidence of engaging in utilitarian moral calculus vis-à-vis the weighting of harm and benefit in assessments of wrongness. I show that in judging everyday immoral behavior, people weight an action's benefits against its harms, and use the former as a mitigating factor in formulating moral judgments. Strikingly, I demonstrate that benefits reaped by the perpetrator of the immoral act lessen its perceived wrongness: the more benefit a perpetrator accrues from their own bad act, the less wrong people perceive that act to be. This work both advances the field's understanding of people's commitment to utilitarianism, and paves the way for additional research on the way benefits are factored into everyday moral judgment.