

Social Influence on Moral Judgements

Abstract: Across the social sciences, our capability to form and act upon moral judgements is attributed a pivotal role in the unequalled success of the human species. Evidently, many important moral problems are dealt with in the public sphere. This raises the question whether moral judgements are shaped by social influence. Using the tools of experimental economics, we document that the presence of other people and other people's moral opinions has large and significant effects on peoples' moral judgements. Examining underlying mechanisms reveals two distinct channels: First, providing information about the moral opinions of others directly shifts participants' own views. Second, participants who are exposed to social reward and punishment mechanisms strategically distort publicly visible moral judgements to make them conform with majority views.