Moods and Ethics of Justice

Mladen Pecujlija (✉ pecujlija@gmail.com)

Faculty of Technical Sciences, Novi Sad, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9740-7645>

Sonja Kokotovic

Faculty of Technical Sciences, Novi Sad

Ljiljana Miletic

Faculty for Project and Innovation Management, Belgrade

Brief Report

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Abstract

In 2019, a survey was conducted with 2593 undergraduate students to investigate relation among their ethical orientation toward justice and moods. The research was conducted by means of these two instruments: by ethical orientation questionnaire and by PANAS X scale, instrument that is based on Watson's model of affective experience. The results indicate that basic positive affect (BPA) and basic negative affect (BNA) are able to predict ethical orientation toward justice.

Introduction

Moral emotions provide the motivational force the power and energy to do good and to avoid doing bad (Kroll & Egan 2004). Some psychologists suggest that the interaction of cognitive and emotional experiences may actually promote the development of both (LeDoux et al, 2016). Smith et al. (2002) found that public exposure of moral (transgressions) and nonmoral (incompetence) experiences was associated more with shame than guilt in a series of studies with non-clinical samples of college students. The features that were distinctive of guilt included remorse, self-blame, and the private feelings associated with a troubled conscience. A recent fMRI study (Green et al 2001) of the influence of emotional engagement upon moral judgment demonstrated that brain areas associated with emotion are much more active during processing of "moral" type dilemmas than of "non-moral" type dilemmas, thus suggesting that moral judgment is at least as much an emotional process as a cognitive one. This study is an attempt to better understand how two important aspects of human experience, cognition and affect (moods), come together in moral domain.

Moods

Watson (2000) studied affective experience by focusing on mood, which is an episode of varying length during which a person experiences multiple emotions that seem to follow certain cyclical patterns. He and his colleagues developed a hierarchical, two dimensional model of affect based on their research results (Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1999; Watson, 2000; Watson and Clark, 1997). Watson's approach provides a theoretically based and empirically supported view of how emotions, moods, and temperament-based affective experiences seem to center around two basic dimensions, Positive Affect and Negative Affect. Lazarus (1991) insisted that cognition precedes affect, while Zajonc (1980) argued that affective responses precede cognitive interpretations of stimuli (e.g. ethical dilemma). Instead of assuming that one or another goes first, Watson believes that all these systems respond to the environment synchronously in a complex series of feedback loops called bio-behavioral systems. Affect serves many important adaptive functions. Haidt (2007), wrote about connection between disgust, elevation and morality. Watson (2000) wrote that positive affect (BPA) and negative affect (BNA) coexist, but they operate independently of each other, and should be treated as two separate concepts. In this context it is interesting to mention Narvaez (2013, 2016) Triune Ethics (TET) an interdisciplinary theory whose goals are to link moral psychology with affective neuroscience. She outlines that three types of ethics can drive human morality. They are based on different affectively-based moral stances that

persons can take: one oriented towards security (the Ethic of Security) and focused on self-preservation through safety, and personal and in-group dominance. Another is oriented towards emotional engagement with others (the Ethic of Engagement), particularly through caring relationships and social bonds. The third is the Ethic of Imagination, which is focused on creative ways to think and act socially.

Justice

In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2016) it can be read: “There are many different conceptions of the virtue of justice, and only some of them are distinctively virtue ethical. This is especially the case with justice, where (as we have seen) it is naturally tempting to account for the *norms* of justice first and derive an account of the *virtue* in light of those norms. An "ethic of justice or rights" is based on abstract, impersonal principles, like justice, fairness, equality or authority (Kohlberg 1984.). People who prefer this style see ethical dilemmas as involving primarily a *conflict of rights* that can be solved by the impartial application of some *general principle*. People with this style try to be objective and fair, hoping to make a decision according to some standard that is "higher" than any specific individual's interests (Rest et al, 1999). By listening to women's experiences, Gilligan (1982) offered that a morality of care can serve in the place of the morality of justice and rights espoused by Kohlberg. In her view, the morality of caring and responsibility is premised in nonviolence, while the morality of justice and rights is based on equality. The question is, what emotion might be reliably enough aroused in justice-relevant situations, in actors and observers, to make a sizable contribution to justice (Lucas et al, 2018). With the above in mind we have formulated research question as follows: Do moods are related with ethical orientation towards justice?

Method And Measures

Basic Positive and Negative Emotions (BPE and BNE) was measured by PANAS X (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Expanded Form). Ethical orientation toward justice was measured by EOQ (Ethical Orientation Questionnaire, Cronbach`s Alpha=0.878).

The sample consisted of 2593 students of all years of studies at University of Novi Sad randomly selected (1604 males (61.9%) and 989 females (38.1%). The feedback from 3345 participants on PANAS X (response rate=64.83 %) has been received out of the 5000 questionnaires sent by email to the participants. In the second stage, answers on Ethical Orientation Questionnaire were received from 2631 participants.

Data Analysis And Results

In order to answer research questions the achieved results were subjected to SEM analysis by WARPLS software.

Table 1: Moods and justice

Path coefficients	
JUSTICE	
BPA	0.184 (p<0.001)
BNA	-0.176 (p<0.001)
Effects sizes	
JUSTICE	
BPA	0.047
BNA	0.044

The Path Coefficient (Table 1) clearly shows that the link between BPA and BNA with the dependent variable (JUSTICE) is significant and that BPA and JUSTICE move in a positive direction: an increase in BPA is associated with the increasing values of JUSTICE orientation. When the effect size is analysed, it can be seen that the effect of BPA (0.047 on JUSTICE) is relatively low, however, it is at an acceptable level which allows its interpretation (Table 1). BNA and JUSTICE move in a negative direction: an increase in BNA is associated with the decreasing values of JUSTICE orientation. When we analyse the effect size we can see that the effect of BNA (0.044 on JUSTICE) is relatively low, however, it is at an acceptable level which also allows for its interpretation.

Discussion

Regarding the justice score, it was found that BPA and BNA can be statistically significant predict justice score at the level of 0.00. BNA can negatively predict justice score while BPA can positively predict justice score. Although this finding indicates that emotional experience as an extra variable in the relationship between cognition and moral judgment and this study is an exploration of the types of emotions experienced as adults make moral judgments.

Higher tendencies towards justice are present only in respondents with high BNA. It is interesting to note that individuals with low BPA have a pronounced tendency towards justice, while those with very pronounced BPA have an average tendency towards justice. Regardless of Watson's claim that BPA and BNA function independently when it comes to morality, we cannot agree with his statement because increase in BNA and decrease in BPA lead to the same thing: increasing tendencies towards justice.

Conclusions

Strength of this study is sample size and finding that suggested that our moods affects our moral orientations toward justice. Limitations lays in fact that we did not include age, cultural dimension (only Serbian subjects) and personal characteristics in this relation.

It would be very interesting to relate these findings to similar ones of Universal Grammar (Mikhail, 2007); UMG distinguishes between the innate universal moral grammar that we are born with (though perhaps not immediately fully developed) and the moral grammar that we acquire through experience.

Declarations

No conflicts of interest

Ethical approval: This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

All information about participants are anonymized and the submission does not include images that may identify the person

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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