

The Impact of Religion on the Development of Morality

Vivian Liu^{1,a,*}

¹Cheltenham Ladies College, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom

a. liuv@cheltladiescollege.org

*corresponding author

Abstract: This review explored the relationship between morality and religion. Morality is an essential aspect to a peaceful society. The role of religion in morality is intriguing. Both cultural transmission and interpersonal communication are fundamental aspects of religion. The development of morality can be divided into external and internal factors. This study discussed the different variations in morality and examined whether religion is the only factor that influences morality. It also explored how different religions view a specific factor of morality. The effect of personal moral philosophies on consumers' ethical beliefs is included as well. The second section focused on the role of religion in prosocial behaviors. Whether religious individuals demonstrate more prosocial behaviors was discussed. Religion does show a significant influence on prosocial behaviors, however, it may vary under different cultural circumstances. This review can provide some guidance to the design of interventions or courses for moral development in schools and communities.

Keywords: religion, morality, prosociality

1. Introduction

Morality is about the guidelines that one sets themselves which dictate right or wrong behavior. This is important as guidelines help people to get along and live well with each other. Religion is the belief or worship in a deity or a practice [1]. This is similar to morality because it also provides rules for people to follow in order to get along with each other. These are all important, as people will learn more about the human mind, not physiologically, but also the process of decision making, what impacts it. It not only would allow for individuals to be further educated about the human mind, but it would also foster the improvement of society. The investigation of this topic will impact human lives for the better such as improving in welfare, establishing new laws and policies and as well as helping educational systems to know what best suits each individual in their steps towards learning new things.

Cultural transmission, emphasizing the cognitive aspects of sculptural learning, is an essential aspect of religion [1]. It highlights human communication involving intricate processes, not mere information transfer or imitation. Another theoretical model of religion focused on interpersonal communication [1]. Nevertheless, it is important to remember, religion is not only about these two models. Religion also has different interpretations. For example, religion could be signals. Signals are a bodily entity or event that transfers information [1]. The concept of a signal is fundamental in understanding the transmission of information. It was argued that most religions have elaborate, costly rituals that are conducted due to religious events. Religious organizations can pass religious

beliefs from generations to generations. Inner understanding and motivation are also vital aspects of the development and maintenance of religious beliefs.

Morality can be reinforced by both external and internal factors. The process of making moral decisions could thus be complicated. The first theory considers how different life experiences lead to different levels and expectations of morality. The second moral theory focuses on how moral developments change over time, using cross section comparisons to prove accuracy. The third theory investigates how moral violations can develop in a prosocial context. The fourth theory is about how institutions also successfully enforce moral behavior, making sure that they can be maintained and to make society a better place by passing it through generations. Although society focuses widely about external factors regarding morality, there are also theories regarding the internal factors, such as Parson's theory, moral psychology, moral schemas, and social identity. Parson claims that human personalities are constructed from external factors and that one is not born with them. Moral psychology is mentioned, stating that people's reasoning differs from people's moral value. Moral schema shows human's knowledge structures that are built from social interactions. Social identity is similar to moral schema, except that it is used in groups, hence the term social [2].

In this following section, variations in morality across different religious backgrounds and the role of religion in prosocial behavior will be discussed. These factors all relate to this topic as these topics all are somehow related to religion and morality. For example, researching about variations of morality across different religious backgrounds would further educate others on why different people might have different morals. Knowing about the role of religion in prosocial behavior might help enhance prison education by teaching the criminals/offenders about these.

2. Variations in Morality across Different Religious Backgrounds

A previous study shows variations in morality in different religious backgrounds, stating the religion is not the only factor that determines morality. They investigated if distinct mental states hold varying moral significance for Jewish and Protestant participants. The study, conducted online like previous research on related subjects, revealed that Protestants claimed higher religious or spiritual inclination compared to Jews, while Jews exhibited greater education levels than Protestants. These results show that people who have a religion are as prone as those without religious beliefs to betray trust in an experimental game, where social behavior remains unseen and isn't targeted toward a self-chosen group of recipients [3].

Betraying trust, one aspect of morality, might be looked at differently even from one religion. In a study led by Kirchmaier and colleagues, they conducted an experiment examining the correlation between religion, moral behavior, and attitudes. They collected data from a panel of 7000 individuals across 4000 households, utilizing monthly internet questionnaires. The results, presented in an aggregated manner, highlight discernible patterns and the robustness of findings. The study found that individuals with religious affiliations are as likely as those without to betray trust in an experimental game, where social behavior is unseen and not directed towards a self-selected group. Additionally, religious individuals express a lower preference for redistribution. Exploring denominational differences, Catholics betray less than non-religious individuals, while Protestants betray more than Catholics and are similar to the non-religious. The study also delved into the intergenerational transmission and potential causality of these associations. This study mainly focuses on an experimental game, it may not fully depict the complexity of real-world moral decision making, limiting the generalizability of findings. The exploration of intergenerational transmission and causality lacks depth, requiring more comprehensive analysis and control for confounding variables [4].

This research explores how intrinsic religiosity, quest religiosity, and personal moral philosophies (idealism and relativism) predict consumers' ethical beliefs. A survey conducted online involved 500

US consumers to examine these associations. Findings reveal that both intrinsic and quest religiosity are linked to negative beliefs about unethical consumer actions, including gains from illegal activities. Additionally, positive beliefs in pro-social actions, shaped by idealism, were evident in the results. The research provides valuable insights into how religious orientation and individual moral philosophies collectively shape consumer perspectives on ethics. Understanding these influences contributes to a broader comprehension of the complex interplay between religiosity, personal values, and ethical considerations in consumer behavior. While this study shows correlations between religiosity, moral philosophies, and ethical beliefs, it falls short in establishing causation or directionality in these relationships. The cross-sectional design hinders the ability to draw conclusions about the temporal sequence of variables [5].

3. The Role of Religion in Prosocial Behavior

Prosociality in Muslims is shown here by the different percentile of people who chose to donate different amounts. In the research study conducted by Duhaime, he has done an experiment about Muslims and prosocial behavior. The study involved 63 shopkeepers in tourist-focused shops, fluent in Berber. Shopkeepers were approached individually, presented with a Berber consent form, and invited to participate in a research study on charitable giving decisions. The form mentioned potential compensation of up to 20 dirhams (over \$2), equivalent to a short taxi ride, fruit purchase, or lunch in Marrakech. In their results, they concluded that out of the total participants, 6% opted for no donation, 24% selected a 30-dirham donation, and 70% preferred a 60-dirham donation. The majority chose a 60-dirham donation, being the highest donation, which proves Muslims to be quite altruistic. However, this study did not have a control group, which lowers the reliability as there was no other religion to compare [6].

Christians are shown here to be prosocial and the majority attending church. Using five contact priests, more than 1000 surveys were handed out across 20 Catholic parishes in Belgium, representing the prevalent Catholic environment. These parishes encompassed traditional churches, a parish focused on charismatic renewal, and a university parish. Before Mass, questionnaire packets were placed near church seats, and after Mass, priests explained the well-being study by university researchers, encouraging immediate completion. Participants could take a copy home, returning it in a supplied postage-paid envelope valid for one day. The final sample comprised over 500 people (over 40% response rate, 50% women, average age 55). Seven participants with non-Christian affiliations were excluded from analyses. The results showed positive and significant correlations between sharing and all three variables related to religiousness and spirituality, with significance observed specifically for spirituality and church attendance. However, what this study doesn't take into account is the number of Christians worldwide and only looks at the parishes in Belgium. Similar to the study shown above, they only focus on Christians, making it unreliable as there was no other groups to compare [7].

To examine the role of social enforcement in the relationship between religion and prosocial behavior, participants from over seventy countries were involved. A multifaceted gauge of personal religiosity was employed, amalgamating church attendance and self-identification as religious. Church attendance was evaluated using an 8-point scale, spanning from "never" to "several times a week." Participants also rated their self-perceived religiousness on a scale from "extremely non-religious" to "extremely religious." The findings revealed noteworthy positive impacts of personal religiosity and a country's degree of religious enforcement on individuals' intrinsic religious orientations. In general, religious individuals were more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors compared to nonreligious individuals. However, this effect was significantly weaker or even absent when the choice of being religious was imposed by social rules compared with a personal choice [8].

This study shows that people aren't prosocial based on their own thoughts or actions. They are, in fact, prosocial because of other contributing factors, their internal deity, or external societal pressures. For the study on whether religion made people moral, Norenzayan used sociological surveys, assessing whether self-reports of religiosity were actual prosocial behavior measured under controlled conditions and she also combines two techniques going beyond the previous two ways, cognitive priming and games from behavioral economics. From these approaches, she came to the conclusion that religion promotes prosocial behavior through supernatural monitoring and cultural practices, fostering moral sentiments. However, the link between religion and morality varies across cultures, being weaker in small-scale groups. Morality and pro-sociality can evolve independently of religion, with secular institutions also serving social monitoring functions. In essence, supernatural monitoring and cultural practices contribute to social solidarity and extend moral concern to strangers through a cultural evolutionary process. She gets this result from asking questions and cognitive priming. However, cognitive priming might not always be the best way to test for something as it is proven that cognitive priming is influencing specific mental associations, influencing subsequent thoughts or behaviors [9].

Prosocial behavior might be reinforced by religion through the pressure of their community and their deity. In a study, participants from the general public were randomly selected through Qualtrics' diverse market research panels, each offering different incentives. A longitudinal investigation was carried out to illustrate the directional relationships stemming from four fundamental aspects of religion. The findings suggest that when individuals with religious affiliations provide assistance, they may be adhering to the guidance of their divinely appointed leaders and sacred texts, focusing primarily on serving fellow members of their own church, temple, or mosque. Notably, divine moral authority and active engagement in religious service consistently predicted subsequent donations to the local religious group. Additionally, frequent participation in religious activities signaled a commitment to the religious institution to other members [10].

4. Conclusion

In sum, the research conducted on religion and morality can be summed down to two key points: the relationship regarding religion to pro-sociality and the variations in morality across different religious backgrounds. A previous study shows the variations in morality and that religion is one of the factors that influence morality. Betraying trust is one of the moral violations that is strongly related to the degree of religious beliefs. Personal moral philosophies had a significant impact on consumers' ethical beliefs. Prosociality was shown to be related to religious beliefs in Muslims through a donation in which they could donate different amounts. Christian's prosociality level was shown to be associated with church attendance. Religion plays an essential role in prosociality. However, when religious belief was imposed by the society or community, its effect on prosociality became weaker. It demonstrates that internal motivation of morality is related to a personal choice of religion. This review can provide some suggestions to the development of educational programs related to morality in schools and communities.

References

- [1] Boyer, P. and Bergstrom, B. (2008). *Evolutionary perspectives on religion. Annual review of anthropology*, 37, 111-130.
- [2] Hitlin, S. and Vaisey, S. (2013). *The new sociology of morality. Annual review of sociology*, 39, 51-68.
- [3] Cohen, A.B. and Rozin, P. (2001). *Religion and the morality of mentality. Journal of personality and social psychology*, 81(4), 697.
- [4] Kirchmaier, I., Prüfer, J. and Trautmann, S.T. (2018). *Religion, moral attitudes and economic behavior. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 148, 282-300.

- [5] Chowdhury, R.M. (2018). *Religious orientations and consumer ethics: The mediating role of personal moral philosophies*. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 38(3), 315-330.
- [6] Duhaime, E.P. (2015). *Is the call to prayer a call to cooperate? A field experiment on the impact of religious salience on prosocial behavior*. *Judgment and Decision making*, 10(6), 593-596.
- [7] Van Cappellen, P., Saroglou, V. and Toth-Gauthier, M. (2016). *Religiosity and prosocial behavior among churchgoers: Exploring underlying mechanisms*. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 26(1), 19-30.
- [8] Stavrova, O. and Siegers, P. (2014). *Religious prosociality and morality across cultures: How social enforcement of religion shapes the effects of personal religiosity on prosocial and moral attitudes and behaviors*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(3), 315-333.
- [9] Norenzayan, A. (2014). *Does religion make people moral?* *Behaviour*, 151(2-3), 365-384.
- [10] Reddish, P. and Tong, E.M. (2021). *A longitudinal investigation of religious prosociality: What predicts it and who benefits?* *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 15(4), 552-562.