Moral relativism and the moral/conventional distinction

1. Introduction

Contemporary moral psychology is pervasively influenced by the idea that morality is universal and impersonal (e.g., Goodwin & Darley 2008). One of the most influential arguments that morality is so constrained is the alleged distinction between moral and conventional rules. This moral/conventional distinction implies, among other things, that individuals perceive moral rules to be generalizable, meaning that they hold across different social contexts. It further states that people perceive moral rules as justified by universal principles of rights, justice and harm. Conventional rules on the other hand are then seen as relative to the social context, meaning that they are justified by and varying with the social context. In this paper, we argue against these views, defending instead that a substantial number of individuals think of morality as relative to the social context.

We proceed by first expanding upon the theory of the moral/conventional distinction. We explain its relevant philosophical background and then explain its empirical arguments. In the third section, we critically evaluate its arguments for a non-relative morality and lay out the purpose of our research. In the fourth section, we report experimental results that argue for morality being perceived as relative to the social context. Finally we discuss the relevance of these findings for moral philosophy, most notably for work on moral relativism.

2. Moral relativism and the moral/conventional distinction

In recent empirical work, the moral/conventional distinction is generally described as the following empirical claim. It is argued that most individuals develop the capacity to distinguish two kinds of social prescriptions or rules. One cluster of rules is perceived as belonging to the moral domain and triggers associated mental computations. The other cluster of rules is perceived as belonging to the conventional domain and triggers other, convention-specific mental computations. What then are these domain-specific computations? One can summarize the core idea as consisting of four features (see discussion in Kelly et al. 2007), two of which we already mentioned in the introduction. Moral rules are generalizable, meaning that they prescribe behavior here and now but also in other countries and at other times; conventional rules on the other hand are local. Conventional rules are further authority dependent: they can be suspended by authority structures or an authority figure. Moral rules are authority independent. The distinction is further characterized by the justification of these rules: the reason why moral rules hold is because they serve to avoid harm, injustice or rights violations. Conventional rules on the other hand are justified by consensus or social functioning. More contentious features are that violations of moral rules (i.e., moral transgressions) are more often judged to be wrong and are deemed more seriously wrong than conventional transgressions (e.g., Huebner et al. 2010 vs. Smetana 1993). Other distinguishing features that have been suggested are for example rule alterability (e.g., Nucci & Turiel 1993), or punishability (e.g., Huebner et al. 2010; Miller et al. 1990). Disagreement further exists over the scope of the moral domain. A substantial part of the human population treats for example disgusting behavior as a moral transgression (e.g., Nichols 2004; Haidt 1993). This heterogeneity in the theory’s exact hypotheses stands in contrast to the common conviction that ‘morality’, whatever its scope, is perceived as generalizable and justified by reference to certain universal principles. It is contrasted with ‘convention’, being variable.
with and justified by aspects in the social context. We can summarize this as the statement that morality is not relative to the social context while convention is; we will discuss our use of the word ‘relativism’ in section 5. In order to evaluate this claim, it will show useful to first discuss its theoretical background, after which we explore the methodology used to prove it.

In 1983, Turiel laid out the theoretical and conceptual basis of his theory of social knowledge. First he gave working definitions of ‘moral prescriptions’ and ‘conventional prescriptions’, hereby referring to philosophical theories (Turiel 1983: 33-40). Turiel (1983) refers to the work of philosophers as Gewirth, Searle, Dworkin and Rawls to defend the view that there is a distinction between acts that are wrong in themselves and acts that are wrong because of the social context. Harmful acts for example have intrinsic features (such as causing empathic distress in the perpetrator) that cause the individual, in the course of its social development, to morally condemn these acts (id.: 35, 42-43). The same holds for rights and justice violations, Turiel argues, referring to Rawls (id.: 39). Accordingly, moral prescriptions are “universally applicable in that they apply to everyone in similar circumstances” (id.: 36); they are also “impersonal in that they are not based on individual preferences or personal inclinations” (id.: 36). Violations of conventional rules on the other hand do not have intrinsic consequences; instead the reasons they are wrong have to be found in the social context. Wearing your pajamas at school for example might be wrong these days, but it would not be wrong if wearing your pajamas at school was a local convention. In order to be a convention, it must be a behavioral uniformity with a social function, for instance, coordinating interactions; and this is only possible if members of society have shared knowledge about these conventions. Conventions moreover “are validated by consensus” (id.: 34) and grounded by “institutionalized practice” (id.: 37). As a consequence of all this, they are also variable: “in addition to the variability of conventions from one social system to another, they may be altered by consensus or general usage within a social system” (id.: 34-35). Now Turiel adds an important clarification about this conceptual distinction between conventional and moral prescriptions. Moral prescriptions trump conventional prescriptions in that social organization is normally guided by moral prescriptions rather than the other way around (id.: 39). Turiel gives the following telling examples. A vegetarian who argues that killing animals for food is morally wrong argues that it is morally wrong irrespective of a lack of consensus and irrespective of its widespread practice. Another line reads: “today one would not say that slavery was morally right in the 1800s but morally wrong now simply because of a change in the consensus” (id.: 36). This last example will show to be particularly interesting in section 3.

We interpret Turiel (1983) as making two related claims. One is about the justification or reason why certain prescriptions hold: moral prescriptions hold fore reasons inherent to the associated acts while conventions are validated by the social context. From this follows a claim about the generalizability of these prescriptions: moral prescriptions are universal and impersonal while conventional prescriptions vary with the social context. What is implied in the notion of a social context is particularly vague though: it may contain implicit consensus (e.g., usage), explicit consensus (e.g., verbal agreement, a formal contract) and institutionalized practice (e.g., implicit and explicit regulations, written rules, authority rulings). We will not attempt to solve the ambiguities in Turiel’s seminal work; instead we will explore different ways in which morality is considered to be relative on the social context. As Turiel, we are mainly interested in moral psychology; we now accordingly turn to empirical arguments for this theory.
Moral psychologists that have since investigated the topic make use of a specific methodology: the ‘moral/conventional task’. An example of such a task can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1: An example of a typical moral/conventional task.** All scenarios and questions (except the wrongness question) are adapted from Huebner et al. 2010. The wrongness question is adapted from Kelly et al. 2007. The inner ten cells show the signature moral response pattern and the signature conventional response pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>MORAL</th>
<th>CONVENTIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul is a six-year-old child who goes to a public elementary school. One Friday he walked up to one of the other children in his class and hit him just for fun.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After playtime, the children were supposed to put their toys back where they had found them. Luis put his toy on a shelf nearby instead of putting it where he had found it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wrongness</strong></td>
<td>Is it OK for [X] to [act]?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seriousness</strong></td>
<td>[X]’s behavior was: (1, very bad; 4, neither good nor bad; 7, very good)</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authority dependence</strong></td>
<td>If the government passed a law that said it was ok to do what [X] did, would that make [X]’s action OK?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalizability</strong></td>
<td>If [X] lived somewhere where everyone else did this, would it be wrong for [X] to do this?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punishability</strong></td>
<td>How much should [X] be punished?</td>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants are first presented with a scenario describing a violation of a rule, after which they have to answer a set of questions that reveals their reasoning pattern. In the earliest work with children (e.g. Nucci & Turiel 1978; reviewed in Turiel 1983), researchers chose transgressions that spontaneously occurred on school or kindergarten playgrounds; later work also investigates adults and makes use of vignettes developed by the researchers. Typically,
participants first have to answer if the behavior was wrong. We refer to this as the ‘wrongness question’. They then have to answer why it is wrong (‘justification question’). Additionally, they may be asked for the ‘authority dependence’ of the transgressions, e.g. would the behavior still be wrong if an authority figure ruled otherwise. Other often occurring questions are if it would still be wrong if the event had occurred somewhere else, at another time, where everybody did it, in another culture, and so on. All these questions are potential ‘generalizability questions’. Other questions differ from study to study and may include how wrong the behavior was (‘seriousness’, Huebner et al. 2010), how harshly it should be punished (‘punishability’, Huebner et al. 2010) or if the rule can be changed by a higher being such as God (‘rule alterability’, Nucci & Turiel 1993). Before testing, the researchers (or independent coders) classify the transgressions in accordance with the theoretically expected answer patterns (or they follow the classification from previous studies). ‘Moral’ transgressions are transgressions which are expected to evoke the ‘signature moral response pattern’ (Kelly et al. 2007; see table 1), meaning that the act is deemed more seriously wrong, generalizable wrong and wrong independent of authority, and also that its wrongness is justified by referring to harm, justice or rights. The ‘signature conventional response pattern’ (id.; see table 1) characterizes the act as less seriously wrong, non-generalizable wrong and its wrongness is authority dependent and justified by referring to factors in the social context. At first sight, the general result of these studies is that moral transgressions indeed evoke the signature moral response pattern while conventional transgressions evoke the signature conventional response pattern (e.g., Smetana 1981; Nucci & Nucci 1982; Hollos et al. 1986; Huebner et al. 2010). Notwithstanding the large number of studies in favor of the distinction, a deeper look into the literature reveals much disagreement (for extensive discussions see, for example, Gabennesch 1990; Kelly et al. 2007; Quintelier & Fessler under review). We now turn to one line of criticism relevant to the issues at hand.

3. Criticism on the moral/conventional distinction

As mentioned, we are interested in the way in which people are moral relativists. One way to approach this question is to investigate how people use the concept of morality and investigate their folk intuitions about the concept. It should be noticed that this does not go against the main tenets of the moral/conventional distinction. For research in the Turiel-tradition, how people use the notion of ‘morality’ is not relevant: a prescription belongs to the moral domain not because the folk attach the label ‘moral’ to it, but because it corresponds with Turiel-style definitions of morality - namely, being about harm/justice/rights and non-relative to the social context (see Turiel 1983: 34 fn.1). Another way to approach our question about folk moral relativism is by investigating if pure harm/issue/rights issues will be treated as relative to the social context. The finding that harm/justice/rights prescriptions are treated as relative to the social context would contradict at least the Turiel-style interpretation of the moral/conventional distinction that is presented in this paper.

Until recently though, the finding that transgressions of harm, rights or justice prescriptions elicit the signature moral response pattern had been relatively stable. Nonetheless, in order to evaluate these results one has to take into account - as, for instance, Wright et al. (2008) remark - that often a very small range of moral transgressions has been used, paving the way for biased stimuli samples. Gabennesch (1990), in a similar vein, reviews previous studies in order to argue that the (non-)generalizability of prescriptions can also have to do with the
extent to which participants are aware of the prescriptions’ functional origins. Children who have only just learned the rules of a game tend to think of this rule as fixed and universal - a finding that has been long predated by Piaget (1932). We might then speculate that, as soon as individuals come to know about the sheer diversity and functional origins of some harm/justice/rights-related prescriptions, they will include social factors as justifying ‘moral’ prescriptions and they will perceive prescriptions against harm, injustice or rights-violations as less generalizable than before. Finally, Kelly et al. (2007) equally noticed that many studies use ‘playground transgressions’ and conducted a survey with more variable harm transgressions, such as whipping as a punishment, slavery and physical abuse as part of a military training. As predicted, they found that these harm transgressions were not unequivocally deemed generalizable nor did they evoke very authority independent answer patterns. (In the case of slavery, this goes even explicitly against Turiel’s prediction mentioned in section 2.) Additionally, this effect depended on the order of the questions, suggesting that the alleged generalizability and authority independence of a moral prescription can be diminished by the context or experimental framing. As happens in scientific research, these results did not convince everyone. We now turn to some criticisms we think are relevant for this study.

Kelly et al. (2007) did not ask participants why they thought a certain transgression was right or wrong, instead they merely analyzed the wrongness answers and the seriousness answers. Sousa et al. (2009) state that this is not enough: in order to know what drove participants’ answer patterns, one also has to analyze their justifications. Accordingly, they merely analyze the justification answers in order to determine the correct interpretation of the other answers. We totally agree that, for our purposes, the justification question should be asked, but we think it should be analyzed more elaborately than is typically done in moral/conventional research. Also, we disagree with Sousa et al. (2009) when they analyze the justifications only to find out what is driving participants’ answer patterns.

First of all, we do not agree that the generalizability question (nor the authority dependence question) is bound to reveal little about the mental causes of participants’ answer pattern, but we do agree that, as they have been asked in previous studies, these questions were often particularly ambiguous and unrevealing. Let us take a look at some questions that have actually been asked: would [the act] be wrong if [X] lived somewhere else where everyone else did this (Huebner et al. 2010); if people want to/do not want to [do the act] (Miller et al. 1990); suppose in another religion they do not have a rule about [the act] (Nucci & Turiel 1993); would [the event] be OK at home or in another school (Smetana 1981), and so on. One of the problems is that these questions invite participants to bring in their own assumptions. At home, a different consensus may hold but there might as well be another rule imposed by an authority figure; people from other religions might be thought not to have any moral agency at all or it might not be their fault if there is no rule; another school might be imagined in a neighboring village or in another culture. In general, it is unclear if participants are thinking of aspects related to the social context when hearing these questions. This problem is also persistent in the study by Kelly et al. (2007) when they ask, first, if slavery was wrong in the American South 200 years ago and, second, if slavery was also wrong in ancient Greece and Rome. Here, participants might even have reasoned that slaves in ancient Greece received better treatment (and less harm) than slaves in the American South 200 years ago. In short, the generalizability question – and the same argument can be made about the authority dependence question – might be unrevealing, but they can be made less ambiguous.
Second, we do not agree that the justification answers should be solely analyzed to interpret participants’ generalizability or authority answers. First of all, it is not certain that both questions are tapping into the same mental mechanisms: the generalizability question might for example elicit implicit heuristics while the justification question might trigger explicit reasoning processes. For this reason, it is also better to ameliorate the generalizability question itself instead of relying on the justifications to solve ambiguities. Moreover, the justifications participants give are interesting in themselves. Since participants can usually list several justifications, we would be surprised if they did not also list justifications relating to the social context. In previous studies, these same justification answers have been insufficiently analyzed. Typically, studies merely mention that moral transgressions elicit more reference to harm, justice and rights than conventional transgressions. In fact, we predict that a more elaborate analysis, with more diverse ‘moral’ transgressions, might reveal that a substantial number of participants think of moral transgressions as justified by aspects of the social context. In this study, we substantially analyze justifications.

4. This study

The general purpose of this research is to investigate the extent to which people think of morality as relative to the social context. Different research traditions find that people are moral non-relativists (e.g., Goodwin & Darley 2008; Turiel 1983; Smetana 1981). Some recent studies however question this dominant view (e.g., Sarkissian et al. under review; Nichols 2004b) while other traditions have long investigated individual variation in moral outlook (e.g., Forsyth 1980, 1992). In this study, we focus on the moral/conventional distinction and the accompanying claim that the folk think of moral prescriptions as generalizable and justified by universal principles. Methodologically, we take care to use less ambiguous generalizability questions; we also fully analyze justifications.

4.1. Pilot

4.1.1. Materials and methods

In the summer of 2010, we approached random passers-by in the streets in the center of New Brunswick, New Jersey. We asked them to fill out a pen-and-paper survey that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. This study was determined exempt from review by Rutgers IRB.

Pilot testing was done to explore if participants would give relativist justifications and what kind of relativist justifications they would give. We also wanted to compare different scenarios and ambiguous versus less ambiguous generalizability questions in order to know if they elicited different justifications.

We adapted the methods and some scenarios from Kelly et al. (2007). Participants always saw a ‘neutral’ scenario first, this is, a scenario depicting a moral transgression that also goes against authority and convention. They saw the following scenario followed by a wrongness question, justification question and seriousness question:

Mr. Williams is an officer on a cargo ship in 2010, carrying goods along the Atlantic coastline. All the crew members are American but the ship is mostly in
international waters. When a ship is in international waters, it has to follow the law of the state whose flag it sails under and each ship can sail under only one flag. This ship does not sail under the U.S. flag. The law of this ship’s flag state allows both whipping and food deprivation as a punishment; but the captain of a ship can decide that these punishments are not allowed on his ship.

The captain of this ship has issued an order telling his officers that on this ship the rules allow depriving sailors of food if they have been drunk or disobey orders, but it is not allowed to whip them.

One night, while the ship is in international waters, Mr. Williams finds a sailor drunk at a time when the sailor should have been on watch. After the sailor sobers up, Mr. Williams punishes the sailor by giving him 5 lashes with a whip.

Is it OK for Mr. Williams to whip the sailor?

If you answered no, why is it not OK for Mr. Williams to whip the sailor? If you answered yes, why is it OK for Mr. Williams to whip the sailor? Please briefly list all the reasons you thought of while you were answering question 1.

On a scale from 0 to 9, how would you rate Mr. Williams ’ behavior?

This was followed by a scenario probing for authority dependence and a scenario probing for generalizability, each followed by questions. The use of scenarios instead of simple questions has the benefit that the details can be made explicit, further reducing possible ambiguities. The order of these two scenarios was randomized between participants. Half of the participants saw an ambiguous generalizability scenario while the other half saw a less ambiguous generalizability scenario. The ambiguous scenario started with the following sentence:

The same thing happened 100 years ago, on a cargo ship carrying goods along the African coastline.

It further described exactly the same event. It was followed by a justification question in order to see if this scenario elicited more diverse associations and justifications. The less ambiguous variation started and ended in a similar way as the neutral scenario, but the middle paragraph was changed into:

On this ship, whipping is a common practice and everyone thinks it is an appropriate way to discipline sailors who disobey orders or who are drunk on duty. These practices do not go against the law of the flag state.

4.1.2. Hypotheses and results

For sake of brevity, we talk about a relativist answer pattern and a relativist participant if a participant said it was wrong to whip in the neutral scenario but not wrong in the generalizability scenario. We wanted to explore if there would be relativist participants, if
there would be relativist justifications and what kind of relativist justifications. We also wanted to explore if relativist participants would give relativist justifications, more so than non-relativist participants. Finally, we asked if ambiguous scenarios would elicit different justifications than less ambiguous scenarios.

In total, 41 participants filled out the surveys. After removal of incomplete answers, there were 39 participants. Since half of the surveys did not use the previously presented scenarios (we were exploring a range of issues), we were left with 13 participants for the ship scenarios (6 men, 7 women). 6 participants saw the less ambiguous scenario, 7 saw the ambiguous scenario. Because of the small number of subjects, we did not perform a statistical analysis; instead we describe our raw data.

Two participants had a relativist answer pattern. Both had read the less ambiguous generalizability scenario and both gave nothing but relativist justifications after the neutral scenario. Justifications were relativist if they referred to issues that are associated with the social context as understood by Turiel (1983). Answers containing any of the following words (and their derivatives) were coded as containing relativist justifications: rule, law, agreement, consensus, declaration, statement, decision; words referring to judicial terms (e.g., jurisdiction, legal). The two relativists’ justifications read:

“because the captain has already stated to the sailors that there would be no whipping. Mr Williams has violated an agreement between his superior and the subordinates an the ship”

“while the law allows for flogging, they captain of the ship forbade it, as he is the commanding officer, his rules are law”

Of the four other participants that had read the less ambiguous generalizability scenario, three gave not only relativist justifications but also justifications that did not refer to social context (dehumanizing, too harsh, alternative forms of punishment). One gave an unclear (nihilistic?) answer. There were no relativists among those who read the ambiguous generalizability scenario; some however did give relativist justifications (as listed). The ambiguous generalizability scenario did not evoke any additional kind of justification.

4.1.3. Discussion

Participants gave relativist justifications and had relativist answer patterns, but this does not mean that they thought of morality as relative. In all scenarios, both moral as conventional issues are present. Participants might have commented on the conventional aspects. However, two participants gave a relativist answer pattern. We have seen that, according to Turiel, moral prescriptions trump conventional prescriptions. We can then interpret these results in three ways. Either the generalizability manipulation (practice, appropriateness and consensus) taps into moral heuristics, or morality does not trump convention, or the entire scenario and its variations only concerned conventional issues for these participants. In order to solve this problem, we decided to ask explicitly about participants’ moral considerations in future surveys.

4.2. Study 1
4.2.1. Materials and methods

We recruited a larger set of participants by emailing them a link to a survey. All potential participants in the email list had previously indicated that we were allowed to send them links to future surveys. Participants were Dutch-speaking and the survey was in Dutch.

We adapted the pilot survey by removing the authority variation. We also removed the mention of a ship captain who can change the rules, since this was not relevant anymore. The middle section of the neutral scenario now read:

On this ship, whipping is a common practice and everyone thinks whipping is an appropriate way to discipline sailors who disobey orders or who are drunk on duty. Food deprivation however is regarded as too humiliating; accordingly, this is seldom used. These practices are all in accordance with the law of the flag state.

We changed the first question into:

Is it morally permissible for Mr. Williams to punish the sailor by giving him 5 lashes?

Depending on their answer (yes/no), participants were then asked why or why not they think it was morally permissible/not permissible. This was followed by a generalizability variation with wrongness question and another justification question.

On this ship, food deprivation is a common practice and everyone thinks food deprivation is an appropriate way to discipline sailors who disobey orders or who are drunk on duty. Whipping however is regarded as too humiliating; accordingly, this is seldom used. These practices are all in accordance with the law of the flag state.

Is it morally permissible for Mr. Adams to punish the sailor by giving him 5 lashes?

Half the participants first saw the neutral scenario; the other half first saw the generalizability scenario.

We added two questions inspired by previous studies. Sarkissian et al. (under review) investigate if people think of moral judgments as right or wrong depending on the individual that is making the judgment. They find that this kind of moral relativism is mediated by similarity (in their study similarity related to cultural background). Specifically, if two individuals who hold opposite moral judgments are less similar to each other, participants are more likely to say that both judging individuals can be right. This is consistent with the view that people think of a moral judgment as right or wrong depending on the cultural background of the judge. In this study, we are mainly interested in the social context of the actors rather than the social context of the individuals judging the act. We included a question about two sailors who had not yet been assigned to a ship.
who held different judgments about whipping and food deprivation. One thinks whipping is permissible but food deprivation is not; the other thinks the opposite. We adapted question wording from Sarkissian et al. (under review):

Bart and Dirk have different judgments about what punishment are morally permissible. We would like to know whether you think at least one of them must be wrong, or whether you think both of them could actually be correct. In other words, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statement

Since Bart and Dirk hold different judgments, at least one of them must be wrong.

Goodwin and Darley (2003) ask what grounds individuals think their moral judgments have. Grounds refer to the justifications people explicitly hold. When asked for the grounds of their moral system, participants have to give justifications for morality in general, not just for one specific case. Hence, the following question was used to probe for participants’ justifications for moral statement in general:

This is a general question about what we could call the “grounding”, or “justification” for moral statements. People firmly believe certain moral statements (such as “do not commit murder”). Check as many of the following statements that you consider support for your moral beliefs. That is, that provide the reasons that you hold the particular set of moral beliefs that you do.
– they are ordained by a supreme being;
– every good person on earth, regardless of culture, holds these beliefs;
– a society could not survive without its citizens holding these beliefs;
– their truth is self-evident.

Among the answer options, we find no relativist justification. Therefore, we added the following two answer options:

- All involved have agreed that these rules should be followed.
- These rules are in accordance with the personal convictions of those involved.

4.2.2. Hypotheses and results

As in the pilot study, we wanted to know how many participants would give relativist answer patterns and/or relativist justifications. We also wanted to know what kinds of relativist justifications participants would give.

90 participants completed the survey. Order did not have an effect on the wrongness answer after the generalizability or neutral scenario (chi-square test; p=.394 for neutral scenario; p=.996 for generalizability scenario). Further analysis was done on the pooled dataset. In the pooled dataset, the social context had a significant effect on wrongness (McNemar test; p<.05); however when analyzing each order apart, this was only marginally significant (p<.1). In absolute figures, of 90 participants, 20 had the relativist answer pattern, 64 considered whipping wrong in both cases and 6 showed the strange answer pattern in that they considered whipping to be wrong when consented and habitual but permissible when
not. Hence whipping was more likely to be regarded as wrong by participants when it was
demed humiliating by the involved actors.

Having relativist reasons for one’s moral system was related to wrongness answers after
generalizability scenario but not neutral scenario.

4.2.3. Discussion

While it is not surprising that habit and personal appraisal matter for the permissibility of a
punishment, the results speak against the view that people are moral non-relativists.

4.3. Replication of study 1

We recruited another set of participants by emailing them a link to a survey, in order to
replicate the findings from study 1. All potential participants in the email list had previously
indicated that we were allowed to send them links to future surveys. Participants were
English-speaking and the survey was in English. This study was determined exempt from
review by UCLA IRB.

Analysis pending

4.4. Future studies

5. General discussion

How do these data relate to philosophical discussions on moral relativism and morality?

How to delineate moral psychology?

Is it reasonable to use the label ‘moral relativism’ for this research?