

# Good essay about moral psychology and acts of kindness

[Experience](#), [Happiness](#)



Since the time of the Ancient Greeks, Western philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle -- among countless others -- have wrestled with moral questions in order to establish a more complete picture of an ethical theory. Two different disciplines, philosophy and psychology, have focused on the moral characteristics, traits, and virtues of people (Doris & Stich, 2006). For all its merits, philosophy does not use scientific methods to determine the context of an ethical theory. However, the blossoming field of moral psychology utilizes an empirical scientific approach to determine how morality fits into a framework built on the foundation of ethical theory. As the 21st century has begun, moral psychology and philosophy have converged and attempted to answer similar questions, each discipline necessarily filling the existing gaps of knowledge (Doris & Stich, 2006). Thus, one of the goals of moral psychology is to address philosophic questions using the scientific methods.

Since the 1970s, moral psychology has been a growing field of scientific research and inquiry. The field has become more and more dedicated to determining the role and its extent following the implementing of educational and policy changes in eliciting good conduct and eliminating poor conduct (Doris & Stich, 2006). Many researchers in the field contend that the basic tenets of moral psychology are derived from an intuitive sense of right and wrong. However, the debate and discussion for good and bad behaviors does not stop there (Cushman, Young & Greene, 2010). Based on brain imaging and reaction times, researchers have discovered that much of our conduct with regards to moral decision-making implicates deliberation and reasoning as key processes (Cushman, et al., 2010). Consequentialist

judgments to difficult “ personal” dilemmas produce increased activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex relative to that associated with deontological judgments (Cushman, et al., 2010). These neuroimaging results support a dual-process theory of moral judgment where distinct “ cognitive” and emotional processes may compete.

Furthermore, researchers have begun to recognize that moral psychology is implicated in a person's level of happiness; For example, people who practice kindness are happier people (Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, 2007). Otake et al. (2007) conducted experiments to determine how kindness affects overall happiness wherein questionnaires comparing subjects' perceived kindness and overall happiness were conducted., Study participants that are happy scored better on their motivation to perform, and enactment of kind behaviors. Happy people also have more happy memories in daily life in terms of both quantity and quality.

Other researchers have conducted similar experiments that show a correlation, if not causality, between happiness and acts of kindness. Hardy (2006) has shown that identity plays a definitive role in moral behavior, reasoning and emotion. Prosocial identity and empathy are high predictors of moral or prosocial behavior. However, this study also found that moral reasoning plays no role in moral behavior. The prosocial identity and empathy, but not prosocial moral reasoning, were positively associated with overall prosocial behavior. These results suggest the importance of considering the roles of all three sources of moral motivation. Going further, Steinberg (2012) suggests that practicing kindness has a physiological

effect, keeping the immune system strong and staving off illnesses.

Steinberg also contends that moral behavior promotes resiliency, strong community ties and lowered tensions in interpersonal conflicts. Steinberg speculates that thinking and talking about kindness may even increase feelings of kindness, as well as promoting acts of kindness.

The foregoing discussion suggests that while previous research studies did address the relationship between happiness and acts of kindness in general population, focused studies on student population as a group are lacking.

Therefore, our studies will attempt to measure the relationship between relationship between happiness and acts of kindness in local student population. Using methods such as surveys and direct observations, student responses pertaining to happiness, moral experiences, and acts of kindness will be collected and analyzed. The variables in the measurements would be whether people are affected by morality and to what extent in performing acts of kindness. It is hypothesized that those subjects who are affected by morality to a greater degree are more likely to perform observable acts of kindness. Based on the literature review, it is not clear if the age of subjects plays an important role in why acts of kindness are performed. As our subjects are younger, college-aged students, we expect that they will display kindness as an effect of feelings of empathy and prosocial identity.

## References

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