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Faith, Frost, and Feelings: The Relationships Among Religion, Emotion, and Moral
Decision-Making

by

Rachel E. Schwingel

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Honors Committee

Dr. Paul Young

Signature: _____

Dr. Richard Stegen

Signature: _____

Dr. Carlton Fisher

Signature: _____

Abstract

Emotions and religious belief play an important role in moral decision-making. This study explores the specific role that these two factors play on moral decision-making as measured by the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ), which uses two subscales to measure idealism and relativism. I primed participants with a religious poem (psalm) or a nonreligious poem that contained either positive or negative emotion. I hypothesized that the religious primes will elicit more idealistic and less relativistic responses for more intrinsically religious participants, priming positive and negative emotions will affect responses to both the idealism and relativism subscales, and cross-cultural experience outside of the United States will be associated with higher relativism scores. I found that the interaction between religion and emotional valence had a significant effect on the mean idealism score. There were no significant effects on relativism. Relativism scores were positively correlated with extrinsic religiosity and negatively correlated with intrinsic religiosity. I conclude that priming religion and emotion does significantly influence idealism, one subscale of the EPQ, and suggest directions for future research to further explore similar effects on the relativism subscale as well as the moderating effects of intrinsic religiosity and cross-cultural experience.

Religion, emotion and moral decision-making processes are both universal and uniquely human issues. Research shows that situational factors such as primed emotions (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2011) and subjective feelings of power (Lammers & Stapel, 2009) can influence moral decision-making. This paper explores religion and emotion as two possible constructs that, when primed, may influence moral decision-making.

Religion

Definition of religion.

While it is impossible to discount the effect that religion and religious belief has on the human experience, religion is a difficult concept to define. Religious experience tends to be particularly subjective and personal. No one definition of religion will satisfactorily cover all aspects of it or successfully describe every type of religious faith. According to Batson and Ventis (1982), “religion is whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the existential questions that confront us. These questions arise because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die” (p.7). This definition highlights the focus of religion as answers to “the existential questions” of life. Timothy Keller (2008) expands this definition to say that religion, “is a set of beliefs that explain what life is all about, who we are, and the most important things that human beings should spend their time doing” (p.15); in other words, religion is a “meaning system” through which adherents organize and interpret their world (Steger, et al., 2010, p.207). While Batson and Ventis emphasize the individual nature of religion as an existential

quest, Keller argues that religion answers questions about existential questions dealing with the meaning and purpose of human life.

The role of religion in society.

Religion plays a unique role in human culture. Baumeister, Bauer & Lloyd (2010) suggest:

Religion...likely appeared at some point in our evolutionary history as a result of adaptations to new problems and challenges that arose from a shifting physical and social environment. Most likely, religion spread because it provided useful benefits to personal survival and/or reproduction by means of facilitating culture (p. 67).

However, this evolutionary view of religion is not universally accepted. Conversely, Bloom (2009) argues that religion survived *in spite* of maladaptive evolutionary features, such as self-mutilation and sacrifice (p.183). But Haidt (2012) emphasizes that, “either you have to grant that religiosity is (or at least, used to be) beneficial or you have to construct a complicated, multistep explanation of how humans in all known cultures came to swim against the tide of adaptation and do so much self-destructive religious stuff” (p.252). Other challenges to the evolutionary history of religion reject the idea of evolution altogether. Instead, religion is viewed as an original part of human history. For example, in *The Reason for God*, Keller (2008) argues, “religion is not just a temporary thing that helped us adapt to our environment. Rather is it a permanent and central aspect of the human condition”

(p. 5). But whether religion is seen as evolutionarily adaptive or not, researchers still admit that religion has had a significant impact on human history. Although Bloom argues that religion is maladaptive, he also states that human history can only be understood by considering religion as a serious factor (p.181). Despite disagreement on the origins and adaptive nature of religion, both secular and religious scholars emphasize how important religion is and has been in human history.

Religion and spirituality.

Religion, this search for meaning, has taken innumerable forms in the course of human history. There are a wide variety of religions, spiritual belief systems, and individual perspectives on the purpose of existence. The concept of religion in some psychological research has been used to denote “a fixed system of ideas” while spirituality is used to mean “the personal, subjective side of religious experience” (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p. 65). While this dichotomous distinction can be helpful in research, Hill and Pargament (2003) also point out that it can be an artificial division that may not accurately reflect reality (p.64). That is, “religion” and “spirituality” may not be as separate or as different as these definitions suggest. Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, and Worthington (2012) emphasize that spirituality may be part of religion or separate from religion (p.31). That is, individuals may experience personal spiritual connection to God, for example, in the context of an organized religious group, such as a particular type of church or denomination. However, individuals may also only experience personal spiritual connection to a higher power outside of organized religion, such as in personal meditation or

experience in nature. Still others may participate in religious activities such as church attendance but not feel a personal, spiritual connection to God. Other individuals may not take part in any religious activities or experience any spiritual feelings or connections.

The benefits of religion and spirituality.

Research on religion and spirituality in psychology has often focused on the benefits resulting from religious and spiritual belief and participation. Religious belief and participation have been shown to have positive effects in a variety of situations, especially in the area of physical and mental health (e.g., Clements & Ermakova, 2012; Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002). The benefits of religion that have been supported by research can be grouped into three general types: social and communal benefits, guidance benefits, and coping benefits.

Social and communal benefits.

Baumeister, Bauer, and Lloyd (2010) argue that religion leads to, “improved cohesion and harmony, increased legitimacy and increased compliance with the rules and practices”, all of which support culture and community (p.67). Jonathan Haidt (2012) agrees. In his view, religion brings people out of their typical selfish thinking and increases feelings of belongingness and group membership (p.248). Such “groupishness”, as Haidt terms it, increases cohesion of groups, even across non-kin groups (p. xiii). Other research has also found that religion strengthens and unifies social groups. Religion creates solidarity, in-group acceptance, and satisfies the fundamental need to belong (Baumeister, Bauer, and Lloyd, 2010, p.74). The support based in acceptance and belonging found in religious communities may be

in a unique position to provide empowerment and services in underserved areas, such as rural settings, where other psychological services are often scarce (Fiala, Bjorck & Fiala, 2002, p.782). Hinde (1999) asserts that group solidarity also plays a unique role in supporting religious belief, as these beliefs are “otherwise unverifiable” outside of consensus (p.63). While individuals do interpret their experiences as supporting their religious or spiritual beliefs, Hinde rightly points out that the very nature of religious beliefs makes empirical proof, for example, of the existence of God, impossible.

The very nature of religious involvement typically involves association with others of the same religion in religious contexts. Some research suggests that these interactions may provide social support that is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from support in secular contexts (Fiala, Bjorck & Gorsuch, 2002, p.764). Religious rituals, especially activities such as chanting and dancing, may psychologically increase feelings of connectedness (Bloom, 2009, p.186; Hinde, 1999, p.130). Fiala, Bjork, and Gorsuch (2002) expand the concept of religious support to include both social support from the religious community or congregation and perceived support from God (p.763). They also point out that religious communities are united around their common religious belief; shared values increase a feeling of social belonging (Fiala, Bjorck & Gorsuch, 2002, p.764).

More specifically, Clements and Ermakova (2012) suggest that one of the specific religious components that supports the link between religiousness and good health is surrender, specifically surrender to God (p.93). Surrender appears to be an important link between religion and good health for the evangelical Protestants in

this study, as individuals that scored higher on a scale of surrender to God also scored lower on measures of stress (p.103). Stress in general is linked to better overall health. Further research with non-evangelical Christian samples to extend these findings to other traditions. While this link was significant in their sample, it does assume a theistic religion with an immanent God concept; nontheistic religions such as Buddhism, for example, do not have a concept of “God”. Islam and Judaism, while monotheistic religions like Christianity, view God more transcendent than immanent. Investigation into this concept in other religions may show an emphasis, for example, surrender to fate or the passage of time in an ever-changing universe.

Guidance benefits.

The guidance and expectations that religions confer through systemized rules, guidelines, and norms can lead to positive health effects. Religion can provide significant guidance in making both daily, small choices and larger, life choices (Baumeister, Bauer, & Lloyd, 2010, p.75; Walker, Smither & DeBode, 2012, p.437).

Baumeister, Bauer and Lloyd (2010) explain:

Religion can provide a solution to the self-regulation dilemmas inherent in cultural life; it helps people to control selfish impulses that might harm group interests, to subordinate short-term temptations to long-term goals, to strengthen inner restraints to curb aggressive tendencies and enact prosocial behaviors, and to adhere to rules and laws governing social life. Thus, religion can contribute to the success of individuals and groups by way of shaping and influencing inner psychological processes (pp.67-68).

With the guiding force of religion, people are encouraged to do what would benefit the greater good, focus on long-term success, and increase their self-control in the face of temptation. These things, in turn, allow humans to live together in community. Such guidance benefits are key, ironically, to a sense of self-efficacy. When guided by religious principles and deities, people feel *more* in control of their environment because such guidance reduces uncertainty (Hinde, 1999, p.57).

However, it is important to note that it is those who are intrinsically religious that are more likely to be guided daily by their religious beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.434; Walker, Smither and DeBode, 2012, p.439). Such intrinsically religious people may be more affected by attempted religious coping in the face of life's stressors (Carpenter, Laney, & Mezulis, 2012, p.22). Intrinsically religious individuals, as the most basic characterization, "live their religion" (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.432). In other words, intrinsically motivated religious people see religion as an end and goal in and of itself. Furthermore, Allport and Ross (1967) characterize intrinsically religious people as internalizing their religious beliefs (p.432). Worthington, et al. (2003) conceptualizes religious devotion differently and suggests that the most religiously committed people are those that show these benefits of religion (p.85). It is likely the religiously committed people are also intrinsically religious. Worthington, et al. describe the most religiously committed people as interpreting events in their life in terms of their religion (p.94); intrinsically religious individuals as described by Allport and Ross "live" their religion and tend to bring all other parts of life in line with their religious beliefs

(p.441). These sentiments are very similar and likely describe the same subset of religious individuals. Clearly, the notions of religiously committed people interpreting their lives in terms of their religion (Worthington, et al., 2003, p.94) and intrinsically religious individuals basing their whole approach to life on their religion (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p.167) are quite similar. The Religious Commitment Inventory and the I/E-Revised Scale contain other similar items; for example, compare “I often read books and magazines about my faith” from the Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington, et al., 2003, p.87) and “I enjoy reading about my religion” from the I/E Scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989, p.348).

Coping benefits.

As a most basic truth of the human condition, all people need ways to cope with negative life events (Hinde, 1999, p.58). Religious coping may be used in the face of, for example, depression. However, such religious coping may be positive and effective or negative and maladaptive (Carpenter, Laney, & Mezulis, 2012, p.20; Wood, et al., 2010, p.148). Positive religious coping may consist of behaviors such as benevolent religious reappraisals, seeking spiritual connection and seeking spiritual support from others (Carpenter, Laney & Mezulis, 2012, p.20). While religious coping is similar to secular types of coping, it seems to contribute unique variance to the style and effectiveness of coping (Carpenter, Laney & Mezulis, 2012, p.20; Wood, et al., 2010, p.149).

The negative effects of religion and spirituality.

However, religion and spirituality may have negative, as well as positive, effects (Steger, et al., 2010, p.207). A substantial body of research suggests that

religion and spirituality may be associated with a variety of negative effects and outcomes. For example, religious people were found to have harsher attitudes towards criminals, prostitutes, homosexual people, and other non-conformists (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.432). This general association of religiosity and prejudice is still a popular topic in psychological literature, but is quite complicated (Village, 2011, p.269). It appears that religious orientation and personality traits may moderate the relationship found between religiosity and increased prejudice, with intrinsically religious individuals tending to be less prejudiced than extrinsically religious individuals (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.442; Village, 2011, p.270). This relationship has been further supported in a meta-analysis covering data from more recent years (McCleary, et al., 2011, pp. 164-165).

Increased guilt over behavior is one possible negative effect of religion and spirituality. Nelson, Padilla-Walker and Carroll (2010) point out that religious belief is not correlated with the behavior of viewing Internet pornography, but does seem to be associated with increased feelings of negativity and guilt following such behavior (p.137). However, it could be argued that such guilt is not necessarily a negative effect of religious belief. Christianity, especially American Christianity, as a religion of personal salvation that is concerned with individual behavior, views guilt as one possible motivator toward right and good behavior.

Negative religious coping is a negative effect of religion and spirituality, especially in the area of mental health. Spiritual struggle in general has been associated with poorer mental health (Wood et al., 2010, p.149). Examples of negative religious coping include punishing-God reappraisals, expressing spiritual

discontent, demonic reappraisals, and reappraisals of God's power (Carpenter, Laney & Mezulis, 2012, p.20) as well as disappointment and anger with God (Wood et al., 2010, p.162). Such negative coping strategies are linked to increased stress in patients suffering from depression; in contrast, positive religious coping marginally improved depressed patients' functioning (Carpenter, Laney & Mezulis, 2012, pp.26-27). Similarly, activating religious and spiritual concepts by viewing offenses against the self as "desecration" or seeing an offender as a spiritual "outsider" decreases forgiveness, which has positive mental health effects (Davis, et al., 2012, p.38). In addition, religious coping in general combined with intrinsic religiosity is associated with higher distress in Roman Catholics, in contrast to lower distress in Protestants (Steger, et al., 2010, p.209).

Another possible negative effect of religious belief and practice is the link between religion and violence. This association, particularly widespread in the popular mindset, was strengthened in the United States after high-profile extremist activity, especially the 9/11 terrorist attack. Shaw, Quezada and Zárate (2011) point out that "many of the world's enduring conflicts involve religion", but qualify that connection by acknowledging that a variety of sociopolitical variables also play a role (p.275).

Overall, although religion offers many positive, beneficial consequences to its adherents, religious belief does have the potential for negative consequences as well. However, understanding the various negative consequences of religious belief may allow religious people to avoid them and cultivate more positive consequences instead. For example, an understanding of the differences between positive and

negative religious coping may help individuals, including therapists and counselors, purposefully engage in positive coping and avoid negative coping to increase healing and promote good physical and mental health.

Religion today.

Ironically, in the postmodern, Western world, “both skeptics and believers feel their existence is threatened because both secular skepticism and religious faith are on the rise in significant, powerful ways” (Keller, 2008, p.XV). Yet the fact remains that religion is a significant influence in many people’s lives, especially in the United States (Steger, et al., 2010, p.206). Much more research is needed to understand the wide and variable effects of both religion and secularism on both individuals and society as a whole. No matter what an individual believes, the effects of religion, ‘real’ or not, cannot be denied. Baumeister, Bauer and Lloyd (2010) speculate, quite simply, that, “religion seems here to stay” (p.72). Unfortunately, some researchers believe that contemporary academia has avoided studying religion until recent years (Bloom, 2009, p.180; Hill & Pargament, 2003, p.65). And although research on religion and its effects is increasingly available, there is a widespread lack of training for helping professionals to address how clinicians should respond to their patients’ religious and spiritual beliefs and practices (Shafranske, 2010, p.125).

Measuring religion and spirituality.

In part because the concept of religion has so many different definitions and interpretations, there are many scales and measurement techniques for the study of religion and spirituality. Research on religion has focused on belief, actions, and

personal benefits of faith and spirituality. Walker, Smither & DeBode (2012) criticized previous researchers for operationalizing religiosity with overly simplistic conceptualizations, such as simplistic measures of church attendance or narrow religious affiliations (p.438). However, such measurements can be useful if used correctly. For example, if using church attendance as a measurement of religiosity, it would be meaningful to compare people who attend church more with people who attend church less often. It is much more useful to compare more versus less church attendance than any church attendance at all with no church attendance, given the inherent variability in possible church attendance. Gorsuch and McFarland (1972) merely caution that using single-item measures of religion may yield ambiguous results, but conclude that in general the most marked difference between single- and multiple-items scales is the cost involved (p.59). However, Worthington, et al. (2003) argue that using a one-item measure of religiosity is not advisable, especially in the context of assessing religious commitment and its potential effects (p.94).

Yet issues exist even in scales and measurements that use multiple items to assess religiosity. One of the most significant criticisms of many measurements of religion is that these scales indiscriminately attempt to measure religious belief, values, and behavior (Gorsuch, 1984, p.229). For example, a single scale may ask respondents to rate how often they attend religious services (a behavior), rate how important their religion is to them (a value), and whether or not they believe in God (a belief). But the use of a mixed scale may obscure important differences. For example, people that attend church often but do not hold many personal religious beliefs may still appear quite “religious” using such a scale. The same may occur for

a person with many personal religious beliefs who does not attend any religious services. It may be that religion serves a different function with different effects for these two individuals; but both may appear equally religious.

Another drawback to the measurement of religion in research is the lack of religious diversity reflected in psychological scales. Many psychological scales measuring religion are Judeo-Christian (Gorsuch & McFarland, 1972, p.63). For example, Clements and Ermakova (2011) used a scale to measure surrender to God, which is based on a distinctly American, evangelical Protestant view of God and the relationship between humans, God, and His will. Fiala, Bjorck and Gorsuch (2002) admit that the Religious Support Scale they developed has a “bias” towards Christianity; words such as “church” and “God” are used (p.766); such language would have little relevance to, for example, a Buddhist. In a comprehensive review of the contemporary paradigm in the psychology of religion, Gorsuch (1984) only explores scales and concepts related to Christianity; there is no mention of any other religions or lack of religious beliefs. While a single scale may not be able to measure all possible religious belief and non-religious belief, more effort is needed to produce a wider variety of scales, including adaptation of existing scales to measure similar concepts across different religions. A note of caution, however, is necessary regarding scales of religion and people who do not profess a belief in God. Wood, et al. (2010) found that a “substantial subset” of people who reported they did not believe in God also reported being angry with God (p.164). Researchers using scales measuring religion and its effects must be aware that even participants

who do not believe in God may express, at the very least, specific attitudes towards God.

Even closely related religions, such as Islam and Judaism, do not typically use the terms 'church' or even 'God'. In fact, the typically used term for the Protestant idea of a church or congregation in Catholicism is "parish"; even different denominations within the Christian tradition favor different terms that make creating or modifying scales to be used on different religious groups quite difficult. Such denominational differences range from cultural to theological (Steger, et al., 2010, p.207). A scale developed by Gorsuch (1968), for example, measures the participant's conceptualization of God based on different adjectives; the variety found highlights the diversity possible even under the same religious umbrella of 'Christianity' (Gorsuch, 1968, p.64).

Scales that measure religion and spirituality, even when developed primarily for use on Christian populations, still have drawbacks. Scales developed for use with Christian samples are primarily administered on European-American samples (Cook, Sandage, Hill & Strawn, 2010, p.85). This remains true even though, globally speaking, most Christians are not European-Americans. Psychological research continues to focus on its places of origin: the United States, Canada, and Europe.

Hill and Pargament (2003) give examples of measurements and scales of religion that are functionally related to health. A significant amount of the research into the benefits of religion and spirituality focuses on health benefits, such as reduced stress and increased coping ability. Clements & Ermakova (2011) extend the investigation of the health benefits of religious and spiritual belief by suggesting

surrender to God as functional measurement of religion or spirituality that would affect health (p.95). Fiala, Bjorck and Gorsuch (2002) developed a scale assessing perceived support from an individual's religious congregation, religious leaders, and God (pp.762-763). Social support has been shown to affect physiological and psychological health; this scale can be used to determine if part of the health benefits of religion may be due to the social support in a religious context (Fiala, Bjorck & Gorsuch, 2002, p.762).

One of the most influential scales of religious belief measures intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967). This particular measure of religiosity focuses on participants' *use* of religion, not the content of that religion (Gorsuch, 1984, p.229; Walker, Smither, and Debode, 2012, p.439). These scales have been used extensively and updated to increase validity, including an "age-universal" version for use with children as young as fifth grade (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Gorsuch & Venable, 1983). A measure of religious orientation illuminates relationships between religion and other variables more clearly than simplistic measures of, for example, church attendance (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.434).

Note on research in the psychology of religion.

Psychological research of religion is in some ways very different from typical research in the discipline. It is very difficult to study religion in psychological experiments using a true control group when everyone has been exposed to religious beliefs of some kind (Bloom, 2009, p.187). When studying religion, one procedure is to compare more religious people with less religious people using

comparison conditions. Experiments in religion, though, are possible by priming people in a randomly assigned experimental condition with religion (Bloom, 2009, p.187).

Morality and Moral Decision-Making

Definition of morality.

Like religion, morality is a concept difficult to define but clearly interwoven in the human experience. Much like religion, morality is a key part of understanding humanity (Haidt, 2012, p.199). Williams (1994) argues that losing “moral meaning is to lose humanity itself” (p.30). As abstract as morality can be, it is by nature practical as well. Morality helps us respond to the world around us and apply our values and norms to our own experience (Appiah, 2008, p.22). Interacting with others without a mutual understanding about how the other thinks about moral issues can lead to serious misunderstandings and miscommunications (Forsyth, O’Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.829). This need for understanding only becomes more important in the face of globalization and cross-cultural contact.

According to Prinz and Nichols (2010), “in philosophy, morality is concerned with norms, where norms are construed as rules about how we should act or what kind of people we should be” (p.120). However, morality is further defined in psychological research by distinguishing between moral and conventional rules (Prinz & Nichols, 2010, p.120; Machery & Mallon, 2010, p.32). In psychology, conventional rules are seen as arbitrary guidelines for behavior that are based on established precedents that are unique to the situation, time, and place. Conventional rules rely on authority instead of intrinsic rightness or wrongness;

consider rules for which side of the road to drive on. It's not "better" to drive on the right or left, but it is the law that one must drive on the right side of the road in the United States. Moral rules, by contrast, are based on standards of right and wrong that transcend time and place. They cannot simply be made up (Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983, p.1026). They depend less on authority. Consider prohibitions on murder. Most people would still argue that murder is wrong even in the absence of laws against it. Typically, people argue support for moral rules based on potential harm to other people (Prinz and Nichols, 2010, p.120; Sobesky, 1983, p.576). In addition, actions can only be moral if the action is not determined; that is, if the actor had free choice (Williams, 1994, p.33).

Yet in philosophy, and other disciplines, the age-old debate over whether opposite moral claims (e.g., murder is wrong vs. murder is acceptable) must always be the result of one claim being right and the other wrong is still strong (Sarkissian, Park, Tien, Cole-Wright & Knobe, 2011, p.1). In moral philosophy, relativism, broadly speaking, refers to the view in which moral claims can only be evaluated relative to the cultural context or system of values from which they are made (Sarkissian, et al., 2011, p.2; Timmons, 2002, p.38). While relativism has many other meanings and connotations, especially in moral philosophy, this is the definition that most closely matches the purpose of this paper. Williams (1994) endorses this view of relativism, arguing, "human beings can never be completely free from circumstance and situation to make choices that are not tied to them in inextricable ways" (p.33).

Forsyth (1980) conceptualizes moral thought and decision-making as the

interaction between two dimensions, idealism and relativism. Differing levels of idealism and relativism (that is, high or low on each) combine into four different moral positions. Idealism is the belief that the best outcomes are possible if the right action is chosen. Relativism is the rejection of universal moral rules (Forsyth, 1980, pp. 175-176). High idealism is associated with a consequentialist view of morality that focuses on producing the best outcome (Lammers & Stapel, 2009, p.279). Low relativism is associated with a devotion to moral rules characteristic of a deontological view of morality (Lammers & Stapel, 2009, p.279).

Gorsuch and Ortberg (1983) point out that moral decisions and moral behavior may be unique because people are willing to think and act in ways that may be “personally unpleasant” in order to make what they consider morally right decisions or actions (p.1027). Morality is by nature demanding, as it may require people to do what they do not want to (Timmons, 2002, p.134). Although other researchers argue that moral judgments are indeed made with self-serving biases (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.639), it is this willingness to make moral choices despite personal discomfort that underlies the approach to morality based on cooperation. In this view, the bases of morality are different types of cooperation, which are necessary for humans to live together successfully in community (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.640). Hence, systems of morality have served an adaptive function.

Hogan (1973) defines morality as an external system of rules that is meant to regulate social behavior (p.218). However, this definition is very narrow in that morality is based only on rules and is only applicable to interpersonal interactions. In reality, morality may be based, for example, on overarching principles, not simply

strict rules. In addition, morality also applies to personal, private, individual behavior in many conceptions of moral systems. For example, Christian tradition considers pride to be a sin. Pride is an internal state that is a sin regardless of its effects on others. As this case illustrates, Hogan's definition is not comprehensive enough to contain major moral beliefs about what is 'moral' and what is not.

While perspectives on morality vary widely, there are several ways that morality is typically measured for the purpose of psychological study. The broad, abstract concept of morality must be broken down. For example, some studies look at moral thought and moral decision-making, or the ways people think about and make judgments of moral dilemmas (e.g., Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012). Others look specifically at actual moral behavior, not hypothetical thinking about moral behavior (for a particularly famous example, see Darley & Batson, 1973).

Measures of moral decision-making.

One of the best-known names in research on moral decision-making is Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg's cognitive stage theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1963/2008) is very well known but the subject of considerable debate in contemporary psychology. Hogan (1973) credits Kohlberg with reviving interest in moral psychology (p.217); Moroney (2006) characterizes Kohlberg's approach as "unparalleled in its influence" (p.363). However, many researchers and theorists in the subfield of moral psychology have disagreed with Kohlberg's measurement of moral decision-making.

In contrast to Kohlberg's cognitive stage theory, Hogan (1973) lists five different dimensions of morality that together, "explain a considerable range of moral behavior" (p.220). These dimensions are moral knowledge, socialization, role taking, the source of rules/laws, and degree of autonomy in moral matters (Hogan, 1973, p.220). These five dimensions are measured using different scales, such as an IQ test for the moral knowledge dimension (Hogan & Dickstein, 1972, p.213). Hogan makes an important distinction between two moral approaches based on the perceived source of rules and laws. One viewpoint claims that just human laws are based on higher laws; these higher laws can be discovered through reason (Hogan, 1973, p.224). This view is very similar to the conception of natural law of St. Thomas Aquinas (D'Arcy, 1973, p.174). The opposing view considers laws just based not on any higher laws but on the instrumental value of that particular law in advancing the greater good of society (Hogan, 1973, p.220). This view is the basis of the philosophical position of utilitarianism, in which moral decisions are made based on which action will achieve the maximum amount of good for the most people.

Another method of measuring moral decision-making grew out of Kohlberg's research. This approach presents moral scenarios or dilemmas to participants and asks them to report how they arrive at a judgment or conclusion about that situation. Haviv and Leman (2002) asked participants to self-report four real life moral dilemmas: two impersonal dilemmas, one antisocial dilemma, and one prosocial dilemma. Impersonal dilemmas were described as "moral conflicts which did not involve you or somebody close to you directly"; antisocial dilemmas involve "reacting to a transgression...dealing with the temptation to meet their own needs

or desires, acquire resources, or advance their own gain”; prosocial dilemmas deal “with two or more people making inconsistent demands on them” (p.127).

Probing questions followed each description to assess the effect on consequences on the participants’ action in the scenario. The results of this study showed that participants judged the correct action based on both care and justice, but use of these two orientations was inconsistent. This is at odds with Kohlberg’s beliefs that justice is the highest form of moral thinking and that the justice orientation stays constant depending on moral reasoning level, in contrast to type of dilemma (Haviv & Leman, 2002, p.133)

Krebs and Denton (2005) used a similar procedure in phase three of their study. Participants were asked to describe moral conflicts that they had recently experienced, identify the moral issues involved in the conflicts and describe the most moral way of resolving them, regardless of what actually occurred.

Participants were also asked to detail their reasoning behind their judgments and actions. These same participants also completed a written form of Kohlberg’s traditional test of moral reasoning. Krebs and Denton classified the participant-generated dilemmas as philosophical, antisocial, social pressure, and prosocial (p.637).

Philosophical dilemmas were defined as abstract conflicts that do not involve the person or close others; this corresponds to Haviv and Leman’s (2002) impersonal dilemmas. Antisocial dilemmas, like the dilemmas in Haviv and Leman of the same name, involve reacting to transgression, violations of rules, and reacting to temptation, especially to fulfill one’s own needs and desires. Social pressure

dilemmas involve implicit or explicit pressure from another person to behave in identity-inconsistent behaviors that violate one's own values; this dilemma is different from any of the dilemmas used in Haviv and Leman. Prosocial judgments, just like the definition in Haviv and Leman, involve conflicting demands of at least two people or reacting to the needs of others. Krebs and Denton (2005) then used Kohlberg's stage-typing scoring procedure on both the participant-generated dilemmas and the standard Kohlberg dilemmas. They found that participants tended to make judgments characteristic of lower stages in response to personal real-life dilemmas (p.637).

Forsyth (1980) outlined another method of measuring moral decision-making. The Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) measures moral decision-making on two simple dimensions: idealism and relativism. Forsyth had participants rate their agreement with various theoretical moral statements. Unlike Hogan's (1973) five-dimension framework that is measured with five corresponding tests, Forsyth developed one scale of two subsets corresponding to idealism and relativism. Out of these three examples of measures of moral decision-making, Forsyth's EPQ represents a simple yet useful measure of how people think about morality in the abstract.

How emotion is related to morality.

One central debate in morality research centers on the role of emotions in morality. This controversy has been significant in both psychological and philosophical moral research (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012, p.579). One part of this debate focuses on whether moral judgment is comprised of mostly intuition or

mostly cognitive processes. Intuitive, emotional processes are fast and automatic. Cognitive processes are slow and characterized by logic and reason. Prinz and Nichols (2010) sum up the argument of side that emphasizes emotion: “doing something because it is demanded by morality requires making a moral judgment. A moral judgment is a judgment that something has moral significance...emotions are widely believed to contribute to that motivation [that people have to] behave in accordance with those judgments” (p.113).

Jonathan Haidt is a well-known researcher in moral theory; his social intuitionism theory emphasizes that “moral reasoning [is] often a servant of moral emotions” (2012, p.25). In Haidt’s intuitionist view, moral judgments are based on initial emotions elicited by the particular norm violation. Cognitive reasoning to justify decisions based on these internal emotional states come *after* the judgment in Haidt’s model of moral decision-making (2012, p.315). Haidt and the researchers he works with have shown some interesting empirical support for this idea.

For example, in one study, Haidt presented research participants with a harmless taboo story in which a brother and sister decide to have sexual intercourse. They are both college-aged and used foolproof contraception. Both wanted to participate and enjoyed the experience (Haidt, 2012, p.38). The researchers then asked participants if it was morally wrong for the siblings to have sex and, critically, explain their reasoning. Only 20% of the study’s participants said that it was acceptable, but many of the remaining 80% experienced what Haidt calls “moral dumbfounding” (p.40). That is, participants reacted to the scenario with disgust and said the action was morally unacceptable. When pressed for reasons

(which the experimenter tried to refute, in order to test participants' reasoning), many participants were at a loss to explain why, rationally, this was not okay. Haidt takes this to mean that the moral judgment was made immediately based on a feeling- in this case, disgust (p.40). Participants then came up with reasons, some better than others, after they had reached their conclusion.

Haidt (2012) goes on to explain that, "when we're trying to decide what we think about something, we look inward, at how we're feeling. If I'm feeling good, I must like it, and if I'm feeling anything unpleasant, that must mean I don't like it" (p.60). While much of the work that Haidt has done looks at disgust as the particular unpleasant emotion, such emotions could be anger, contempt, or indignation. Moreover, these are not just emotions, but "gut feelings"; fast, fleeting feelings (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012, p.579).

Machery and Mallon (2010) agree that emotions play a significant role in morality. They emphasize that emotions affect moral actions, pointing out that, "the anticipation of feeling ashamed and guilty motivates avoiding the violation of norms, shame and guilt motivate reparative behavior, and anger motivates punishment...in addition to these negative emotions, positive emotions are caused by norm compliance" (p.12). In line with Haidt's (2012) work, Machery and Mallon found in a review of current research in moral psychology that anger and disgust were two emotions commonly elicited by moral norm violations (p.12).

Olatunji, David, and Ciesielski (2012) found that the emotion of self-disgust specifically led to more severe non-moral judgments but more permissive moral judgments (p.171). Self-disgust, which varies across individuals, was measured with

the Self Disgust Scale. Disgust sensitivity, or tendency to experience disgust in general, was measured with the Disgust Scale-Revised (p.170). Participants then read 19 statements describing various offenses that featured either no moral wrongdoing, offenses causing moderate harm to others, or offenses causing severe harm to others (p.170). The researchers found that self-disgust was significantly positively related with disgust and punishment of non-moral offenses. On the other hand, self-disgust was significantly negatively related to disgust and punishment of moral offenses. Disgust with oneself, measured as a trait, seems to have a specific effect on judgments depending on the moral (versus non-moral) nature of the situation.

Other common moral emotions are guilt, shame, anxiety, and fear (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.638; Kroll, Egan, Keshen, Carre, Johnson & Carey, 2007, p.622). Krebs and Denton (2005) asked participants to describe different types of moral dilemmas from their own lives (p.636). Participants used a wide variety of emotion words to describe their reactions to self-generated moral dilemmas in their own lives, but guilt and shame tended to follow dilemmas involving temptation while anxiety and fear followed dilemmas involving social pressure (p.638). Kroll, et al. (2007) explored shame and guilt as expressions of moral worry, a category of ordinary worry, by using an adapted version of Tallis' Worry Scale (p.622).

It is important to note that even incidental emotions, unrelated to the task at hand, can have a significant influence on decision-making (Harlé & Sanfey, 2010; Prinz, 2007, p.28). Appiah (2008) points out that this is worrying, because incidental emotions and associations are quite common in the real world; these

clearly may affect us much more than we realize (p.87). These incidental emotions, such as disgust, have been induced through hypnosis, disgusting smells, and disgusting videos, for example (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012, p.580). In an overview of moral emotion research, Prinz and Nichols (2010) show that brain imaging techniques, such as fMRI research, shows emotional activation in the brain during moral decision-making in most, if not all, studies (p.115).

Prinz and Nichols (2010) extend findings about emotions elicited by specific norm violations and focus on not only anger and disgust but also contempt as moral emotions. In this view, different moral emotions have different functions (p.122). Within the CAD model described by Prinz and Nichols, the moral emotions of contempt, anger and disgust (CAD) are associated with moral violations of community norms, autonomy norms, and divinity norms (CAD), respectively (p.122). In this model, these three moral emotions correspond specifically to different types of moral norm violations. Community norms may include issues of social status or shared goods. Autonomy norms are the most commonly found norms in Western moral codes; they are concerned with harm. Anger is elicited by transgressions of autonomy norms because the victim feels that their basic rights as a person are violated (Prinz, 2007, p.70). Divinity norms deal with issues of purity and transgressing either a divine force or nature in general (Prinz & Nichols, 2010, p.122). This CAD model postulates that specific moral emotions not only play an important role in moral judgments, but that they play a functional role in that they arise based on the type of moral transgression.

However, other researchers in moral psychology do not support models of moral judgment that consider intuitive, emotional processes to be more important than cognitive processes in moral-decision making and moral behavior. In direct contrast to models such as Haidt's (2012) social intuitionism, these researchers offer theories of rational moral reasoning, characterized by deliberate thought. Kohlberg, for example, saw moral development as closely tied to cognitive development. His stage theory of moral reasoning is the most well known example of reasoned moral decision-making (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.630).

Other researchers take a more balanced approach when considering whether emotions or reason are the primary determinants of moral decisions. Cushman, Young, and Greene (2010) argue that, "the evidence that moral judgment is driven largely by intuitive emotional responses is strong, but it does not follow from this that emotional intuition is the whole story" (p.48). Researchers who subscribe to such a view believe that emotions and reason may both play important roles in moral reasoning. For example, people may base their initial judgments on emotions. Yet people do change their minds about moral judgments through reasoned cognitive processes when asked to purposefully reflect. In addition, it may be that different moral decisions are based on different psychological systems, which may be primarily based on emotions or primarily based on reason depending on the type of decision being made (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012, p.580).

More specifically, Cushman, Young and Greene (2010) suggest that people make consequentialist judgments based on cognitive, reasoned processes and deontological judgments based on intuitive and emotional processes (p.51).

Consequentialist judgments attempt to maximize positive outcomes for the most people (Cushman, Young, & Greene, 2010, p.59) and depend solely on the outcomes resulting from the action or lack of action (Prinz, 2007, p.158). This view values the greater good and is also referred to as utilitarianism (Appiah, 2008, p.79).

Deontological judgments, in general, are based on the prohibition of harm (Cushman, Young & Greene, 2010, p.63). Judgments concerning possible harm to the self seem particularly likely to elicit deontological reasoning. For example, people tend to be more willing to purposely kill another person to save themselves and others than they are to kill a person to save a group of strangers (Appiah, 2008, p.100). Killing a person to save a group reflects utilitarian, consequentialist reasoning, as the act (killing the one person) maximizes good (five people are saved). In contrast, refusing to harm the one person and indirectly causing the death of five people reflects deontological reasoning.

Hauser (2006) suggests a different view in which both emotions and reasoning come after judgments of moral permissibility. In Hauser's (2006) approach, neither emotions nor cognitive reasoning causally determines moral judgments (p.215). Instead, Hauser claims the existence of a moral organ or a universal moral grammar based on the work of Noam Chomsky and his universal grammar theory (p.214). More specifically, perceiving an event is followed by judgment based on an analysis of the intentional properties of not only the action or non-action but also the action's (or non-action's) consequences (Hauser, 2006, p.215). Causal properties would include whether the actor *intended* to bring about the consequences. Lay people and the law make distinctions between, for example,

premeditated murder and accidental death. Action, generally, that causes harm is usually considered worse than inaction that causes harm. For example, killing someone by giving them poison is judged more harshly than killing someone by withholding food, even though both people die. Contact also affects judgment; if harm occurs because of contact between the actor and the other person, it is judged more harshly than if the person is harmed without contact with the actor (Hauser, 2006, p.218).

This model holds that this process of analysis is unconscious (p.216). However, this model draws a distinction between moral judgments and moral actions; moral judgments precede emotions and therefore are unaffected by them. But emotions affect moral actions; in particular, emotions helps individuals avoid hurting others (p.216). Hauser suggests that psychopaths, therefore, hurt others despite knowing that it is morally wrong. They do not experience the emotions that would make them avoid that behavior (p.216). He does concede, however, that emotions may play a role in some types of moral dilemmas, especially those that depict personal harm (p.217).

There is still considerable debate about the role that emotions play in moral decision-making. Considerable research, though, suggests that emotions play at least some meaningful role in how people reason about moral issues. The exact influence of emotions, particularly on different types of moral decisions, requires more research.

How religion affects morality.

It has already been established that religion is still a potent force today, even in the face of increasing secularism. Religion can have powerful effects on individuals and, specifically, the moral attitudes and behavior of individuals. The influence of religious belief or practice could affect the moral decision-making prior to the moral judgment, the justification for a moral judgment, moral behavior, or the assessment of one's own moral behavior. Research disagrees on the exact mechanism(s) through which religious belief affects morality, but several researchers have shown that religion likely affects an individual's moral life disproportionately depending on, in the words of Allport and Ross (1967), religious orientation (p.434). Individuals that have an intrinsic religious orientation, "live their religion" (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.434). This "living" religion includes a focus on religion for its own sake; other things in life (such as morality) are brought in line with religious beliefs instead of the other way around (p.434). Walker, Smither & DeBode (2012) emphasize that "we should expect religion to have a positive or favorable influence on ethical behavior only for those individuals who are [intrinsically religious]" (p.439).

Research has established that religious people do tend to report different behavior than non-religious people and claim to be more moral than others. However, associations between religiosity and decreased negative behaviors (e.g., drug use, crime) are weak and few experimental studies support claims of moral superiority by religious people (Hinde, 1999, pp. 138-139). Overall, it appears that religious people are only negligibly more moral than non-religious people. Gibson (2004) argues that this lack of connection is consonant with Christianity, as it is due

to humanity's fundamentally sinful nature, expressing the orthodox Christian belief of the fallen nature of human beings (p.297). However, greater religiosity has been associated with greater moral certainty; regardless of whether or not religious people are more moral, they believe that they are (Shaw, Quezada & Zárate, 2011, p.282).

Haidt (2012) suggests that religion may affect how broadly you define morality. While in general the Western world defines morality only in terms of autonomy and harm, the rest of the world sees moral transgressions that can also be based on violations of what Haidt calls the "ethics of community and divinity". Interestingly, Haidt argues that evangelical Christianity in America also engenders ethics of community and divinity; this is evident in individuals who "can detect disrespect [violation of ethic of community] and degradation [violation of ethic of divinity] even where the apparent victims see nothing wrong" (p.110).

The Judeo-Christian tradition relies on rules for moral behavior. Codified sets of rules such as the Ten Commandments exemplify this rule-based morality. This reliance tends to be related to the moral position of absolutism (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.816). Absolutism is a commitment to producing the best outcomes by following universal moral principles (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.816). McCleary, et al, (2011) expands on this connection and explains that religious fundamentalism is based on the belief that there are absolute and inerrant truths, which is closely aligned with absolutism (p.163). Shaw, Quezada, and Zárate (2011) echo this connection (p.276). Both Judeo-Christian religions and absolutists emphasize absolute, universally applicable moral rules.

This general rule linking religiosity with absolutism appears to be supported around the world; countries that are less relativistic and more idealistic (that is, absolutist) also tend to hold conservative, orthodox and traditional beliefs about religion (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.826). Countries characterized by an absolutist position had the highest reported percentage of belief in God (p.825). On the other hand, countries high in relativism may be, "less traditionally religious" (p.827). However, Forsyth, O'Boyle and McDaniel (2008) do not give specific examples of different countries that exemplify conservative, religious absolutist countries and less religious countries that exhibit higher relativism. The lack of reported examples weakens these claims.

In a meta-analysis of research on perspectives of religious truth, religious fundamentalism, representing an absolutist moral position, was associated with harsher assignments of jail sentences for hypothetical crimes, a decreased tolerance for dissent from norms (or rules), respect for authority, and prejudice towards those that violate norms (McCleary, et al., 2011, pp. 164, 169). For example, when participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario about an individual selling drugs, people who identified as a religious fundamentalist tended to assign longer jail sentences to that individual than those who did not identify as a religious fundamentalist (McCleary, et al., 2011, p.164). Conviction and devotion are both key parts of religious fundamentalism (Abelson, 1988, p.267).

Religion also adds a social component to moral decisions that is becoming increasingly uncommon in the hyper-individualism of Western culture. Members of the same group, like a religious group, often come to a consensus to make decisions

and take actions together (McGraw & Bloomfield, 1987, p.1080; Shaw, Quezada, Zárate, 2011, p.276). Any group decision, moral or not, is affected by a variety of factors, including gender, gender-role, and personality (McGraw & Bloomfield, 1987, p.1085).

Morality and cross-cultural experience.

It is critical to recognize the wide variety of moral and religious beliefs around the world. Unfortunately, research on morality and religion, like all other psychological research, tends to take place overwhelmingly in the West, especially the United States and Canada. There is abundant evidence that such studies are likely not representative of the rest of the world. Strong evidence showing that the Western world views morality and moral issues much differently than other parts of the world come from studies conducted outside of the West (see Haidt, 2012 for a series of examples of this phenomena). In addition, there are significant differences around the world in relative wealth, levels of industrialization and commercialization, religion, political history, and a host of other variables that may influence cultural worldviews. Yet even studies of moral thinking or decision-making conducted in other parts of the world must be carefully evaluated. Even when research is conducted globally, oftentimes the moral scenarios used in research represent stereotypical norm violations of a specific culture (usually American Christian); they are culturally bound (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012, p.589).

Haidt (2012) explains the difficulty of comparing the US with other parts of the world in terms of moral issues: “in the United States the social order is a moral

order, but it's an individualistic order built around the protection of individuals and their freedom...when you put individuals first, before society, then any rule or social practice that limits personal freedom can be questioned. If it doesn't protect somebody from harm, then it can't be morally justified. It's just a social convention" (p.17). This appears especially true for educated upper classes. For example, Haidt developed moral scenarios in which people do things that offend others, but do not harm anyone. He then presented these scenarios to people of varied social class in Brazil and Philadelphia. Brazilians tended to judge violations of social conventions, such as not wearing a uniform to school, were morally and universally wrong more than Americans. Social class also played a role, but the cultural differences were significant (pp. 21-22).

But the differences between morality in the West and the rest of the world do not stop at the West's unfailing devotion to the individual. The moral order itself is becoming increasingly compartmentalized in Western countries; because of this compartmentalization, Haidt (2012) calls the US and Western Europe, "extraordinary historical exceptions" (p.12). Haidt notes that non-Western cultures have moral rules that are based on not just the individual and the individual's rights, but also conceptions of purity and community. These other rules are not based solely on possible harm. One example of this "all-encompassing" moral order that Haidt talks about comes from the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament (p.13). The Old Testament contains innumerable rules concerning cleanliness and purity that seem foreign, restrictive, and arbitrary to modern Westerners who simply base moral judgments on whether someone is harmed. Jews are expected to keep kosher,

for example. These dietary laws prohibit, amongst many other things, eating anything that mixes dairy products and meat products. These laws are only justified by appealing to authority (God said so) and/or ideas of keeping oneself pure of mixed dairy and meat and avoiding disgust of impure things. Neither of these justifications fit with the prevailing Western view that harm to others is what makes particular actions immoral. It is important to emphasize, though, that Americans and other Westerners still retain, for example, feelings of disgust when presented with a scenario that violates purity norms. An example of this can be found above in the story about siblings who have sex together. However, Westerners are generally unable to explain why such disgusting scenarios are morally unacceptable (Haidt, 2012, p.13).

In a meta-analysis of studies using the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ), Forsyth, O'Boyle, & McDaniel (2008) found that adherence to idealism and relativism, the two moral thinking dimensions considered in the EPQ, varied predictably by region and culture around the world (p.813). Countries that were high in idealism tended to report relatively high levels of belief in God (p. 818; 824). The main effect of idealism on belief in God reached significance at the $p < .001$ level, which is highly significant; in the studies analyzed, a mean of 92.43% of people in highly idealistic countries reported a belief in God (P.824). Also, relativism is notably high in collectivist countries (p.826). The main effect of relativism on individualism (the opposite of collectivism) reached significance at the $p < .01$ level; the countries represented in the meta-analysis that scored high on the relativism

scale reported a mean of 35.70 on an individualism scale while countries scoring low on the relativism scale reported a mean of 62.79 on the individualism scale.

The significant differences in morality around the world mean that “you can’t study the mind while ignoring culture, as psychologists usually do, because minds function only once they’ve been filled out by a particular culture” (Haidt, 2012, p.99). However, that does not mean neglecting the unique individual in favor of purely cultural research. McCleary, et al. (2011) claims that culture has a large effect on an individual’s theological views, but that personal psychological variables may also play a part in what type of theological truth people tend to embrace (p.163).

Morality in current research.

Despite the continuing debate over the role that emotions play in moral decision-making, it is clear that this process is somewhat fluid and flexible. Both situational and personal variables may affect moral judgments and decisions. The full range of influences on moral decision-making is still unexplored, which leaves significant opportunity for further research.

Current Study

Experimentation using religious primes.

The current study focuses on a possible relationship between religion and moral decision-making. One way to effectively study the effects of religion on different phenomena is through priming individuals to think about religion first (Bloom, 2009, p.188). Other researchers also support the effectiveness and usefulness of religious primes (Davis, et al., 2012, p.32). One of the most classic examples of an experimental, conscious religious prime is the Good Samaritan study

(Darley & Batson, 1973). In the Darley and Batson study, seminary students were split into two groups. The control group was instructed to prepare a speech about what jobs for which seminarians would be a good fit. The experimental group was instructed to prepare a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which acted as a religious and helping conscious prime (Darley & Batson, 1973, p.104).

In the current study, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 x 2 factorial design. Two of these conditions, positive-religious and negative-religious, read an excerpt of religious scripture. This religious prime is conceptually similar to that used in Darley and Batson (1973, p.104). While in the Darley and Batson (1973) had participants generate thoughts on religion, the religious scripture used in this study were chosen to elicit similar thoughts focused on religion.

Conscious primes, as in the Darley and Batson (1973) and the current study, involves the conscious perception of the prime but no awareness of the effect of that prime on further behavior or reactions (Fiske & Taylor, 2008, p.29). In the current study, reading the religious scripture or non-religious poems, both positive and negative, occurs consciously. However, the participants are not likely to be aware of the specific effects of religion and emotion on the dimensions of relativism and idealism as measured by the EPQ. The lack of understanding of priming effects and the specifics of the particular study should reduce efforts by participants to counteract the effects of these primes (Fiske & Taylor, 2008, p.29).

Hypotheses of the current study.

Based on previous research linking religion with absolutism and fundamentalism (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.816), I first hypothesize that the religious primes will elicit responses to the EPQ that are more idealistic and less relativistic than those elicited by the nonreligious prime. High idealism and low relativism corresponds to the position of absolutism in Forsyth's (1980) conception of moral decision-making as measured by the EPQ.

Although there is a lack of research that specifically links particular emotional states to responses to the EPQ, I further hypothesize that priming positive and negative emotions will affect responses to both the idealism and relativism subscales. The direction of the effects of positive and negative emotions is unknown given the lack of research in this area.

As Walker, Smither and DeBode (2012) emphasize, religion will most likely affect moral decision-making when the individual is intrinsically religious, as opposed to extrinsically religious. I hypothesize that religion would affect moral decision-making, as measured by the EPQ only for those high in intrinsic religiosity. The intrinsic/extrinsic scale measured the participants' intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989).

Lastly, I predict that cross-cultural experience outside of the United States will be related to answers to the EPQ. Cultural differences in moral thinking are well documented (Haidt, 2012); those participants who have spent time outside of the United States may have incorporated some moral reasoning more typical of other cultures. More specifically, I hypothesize that those with cross-cultural experience will have higher relativism scores. First, countries outside the West tend to have

higher relativism scores, in general (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.819). Second, contact with other cultures may simply make people aware that others around the world think very differently about moral issues. The awareness of this diversity makes it more difficult to support the position that there are absolute moral rules that everyone everywhere should follow (Sarkissian, et al., 2011, p.2; Timmons, 2002, p.38).

Method

Participants

Forty-one college students (30 women, $M_{age} = 19.6$ years; 11 men, $M_{age} = 19.54$ years, age range: 18-22 years) were recruited through the Houghton College subject pool. Participants were compensated for participation with either partial course credit or extra credit.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 x 2 factorial design. Each condition was either religious or nonreligious and either positive or negative, creating groups: positive-religious, negative-religious, positive-nonreligious, and negative-nonreligious.

In the positive-religious condition, participants read an excerpt from Psalm 89. This psalm has positive emotion words and phrases, such as "steadfast love", "faithfulness", "praise your wonders", "joyously", and similar words (New York International Bible Society, 1978). Each of these words has a positive connotation and illustrates positive emotions such as happiness, joy, and hope. In the negative-religious condition, participants read an excerpt from Psalm 88. This psalm is quite

unusual because of the overall negativity. This negativity is exemplified in phrases such as “full of troubles”, “wrath”, “close to death”, and the closing line, “my companions have become darkness” (New York International Bible Society, 1978). This psalm illustrates emotions of sadness and despair.

In the positive-nonreligious condition, participants read the poem “Carpe Diem” by Robert Frost. In the negative-nonreligious condition, participants read the poem “Desert Places” by Robert Frost. A poem by Robert Frost was chosen for the positive and negative nonreligious conditions to control for any possible effects of author and style. “Carpe Diem” uses words and phrases such as “loving”, “happy”, and “seize the day of pleasure” (Frost, 1969a). “Carpe Diem”, importantly, contains no religious imagery or words that might confound the religious prime. The poem has clear positive connotations and conveys the idea of the importance of appreciating happiness and not taking the present for granted. “Desert Places”, the negative nonreligious poem, uses negative words and phrases such as “smothered”, “absent-spirited”, “loneliness”, and “empty” (Frost, 1969b). The poem conveys a deep sense of sadness, despair, and anguish.

Moral decision-making was assessed through the Ethics Position Questionnaire set for by Forsyth (1980). This method of measuring moral decision-making is based on Forsyth’s taxonomy of ethical reasoning based on two dimensions: relativism, generally defined as rejecting universal moral rules, and idealism, or extent to which people believe that the best, “right” action can produce desirable outcomes (pp. 175-176). The correlation of the two subscales, relativism

and idealism, is $r = -.07$. Test-retest reliability is .67 for idealism and .66 for relativism. This taxonomy is represented in table 1.

	High Relativism	Low Relativism
High Idealism	Situationism	Absolutism
Low Idealism	Subjectivism	Exceptionism

Table 1: Taxonomy of ethical positions.

Situationism is characterized by rejecting universal moral rules and individualized analysis of each act in a particular situation. Subjectivism is characterized by judgments that are made based on the individual's personal values and unique perspective; this type also rejects universal moral rules. Absolutism generally includes a commitment to universal rules and an assumption that these rules guarantee the best possible outcomes; this tends to fit with deontological approaches to morality. Exceptionism involves accepting moral absolutes but also allowing for exceptions to these rules; this is most closely aligned with utilitarianism. Highly idealistic people (those who embrace situationism and absolutism) tend to espouse an "ethic of caring" (Forsyth, Nye & Kelley, 1988, p.247).

Religious orientation was measured by the I/E Revised Scales (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Eight of the statements concern intrinsic religiosity. Six of the items concern extrinsic religiosity. Participants rated their agreement with each item on a Likert-type scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

Participants were randomly given a packet containing one of the four possible poems, which they read at their own pace in separate rooms. Each packet, after the poem, was identical. After reading the poem, participants completed a word stem completion task intended to act as a manipulation check for religious priming (Cutright, Erdem, Fitzsimons, Shachar). Then each participant filled out the EPQ. The I/E scales followed. Demographic questions appeared at the end. Participants were asked to provide their age, year in college, major(s), information on any cross-cultural experience, and their thoughts on the purpose of the study.

Results

A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing the effects of poem religiousness (religious vs. nonreligious) and poem valence (positive vs. negative) on the idealism subscale of the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) showed a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 37) = 6.29, p = .017$. This interaction effect is represented in Figure 1.

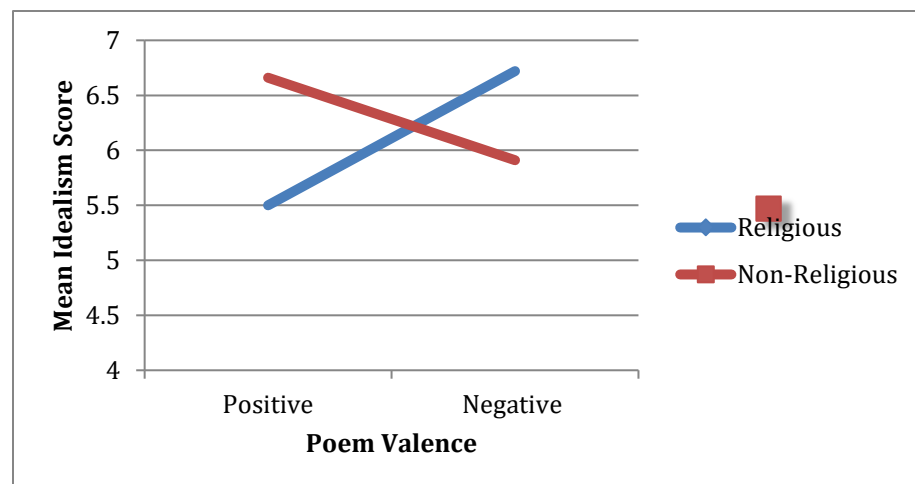


Figure 1. The significant interaction effect of religion and valence on mean idealism scores.

No main effects were found for religion or valence. Contrary to previous research (see Walker, Smither & DeBode, 2012), intrinsic religiosity was not found to be a strong covariant, $F(1, 37) = 1.14, p = .294$. Contrary to the hypotheses on the effects of religion and valence, another univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing the effect of poem religiousness and poem valence on the relativism subscale of the EPQ did not show a significant effect, $F(1,37) = .39, p = .534$. Again, no main effects were found for religion or valence. Intrinsic religiosity was moderately negatively correlated with the relativism subscale, $r = -.366, p < .05$. Extrinsic religiosity was moderately positively correlated with the relativism subscale, $r = .460, p < .01$. No other variables were significantly correlated.

Another univariate ANOVA shows a main effect for religion (religious vs. nonreligious) on word stem completion scores, the manipulation check for religious priming, that approaches significance but does not quite reach it, $F(1, 37) = 3.93, p = .055$. Two univariate ANOVAs show no significant effects of cultural experience on idealism, $F(1, 37) = .002, p = .964$ or relativism, $F(1, 37) = .638, p = .430$. Descriptive statistics for relativism, idealism, intrinsic religiosity, and extrinsic religiosity scores are shown in table 2.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Idealism	2.80	8.10	6.1805	1.31799
Relativism	1.50	7.50	4.5683	1.37340
Intrinsic	22.00	40.00	32.1220	4.70742
Extrinsic	8.00	26.00	15.4390	3.65410

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for idealism, relativism, intrinsic, and extrinsic scores.

Discussion

This experiment partially supports the hypotheses that of religious content and positive or negative emotional valence of a poem can influence responses to the idealism subscale of the EPQ. However, I did not find support for the hypotheses that religion or emotion alone has a main effect on EPQ scores. In addition, I only found partial support for the hypothesis that religiously primed participants would exhibit higher idealism and lower relativism scores.

Only the interaction between religion and emotion was significant on idealism scores. The highest mean idealism score was found in the negative religious condition, while the lowest mean idealism score was found in the positive religious condition. This low mean idealism score for the positive religious condition is at odds with the typical association between religion and absolutism, which is characterized by high idealism and low relativism (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.816) and does not support my first hypothesis. I suggest one possible explanation of the partial support for my hypothesis; these results may not be as surprising or unexpected as they first appear. It may be that the brand of Christianity primarily concerned with happiness and comfort for the self, as expressed in Psalm 89, may increase self-focus and therefore decrease concern for others. The idealism subscale of the EPQ is based on concern for the possible harm of others as consequences of our decisions. More self-focus may make these considerations less important. The finding that the expected increase in idealism for religiously primed participants only occurred in the negative religious condition may be more intuitive. Namely, identifying with Psalm 88 and the despair

unfortunately found in the human condition may increase feelings and compassion for others who may also suffer from negative life events and circumstances. That is, identifying with the negative emotion in Psalm 88 may have reminded participants of the suffering of others. This reminder may have in turn influenced these participants to avoid causing harm to others more scrupulously, leading to higher idealism scores.

Neither the main effects of religion or valence nor the interaction of both variables reached significance for the relativism subscale. This also runs contrary to my hypothesis that religiously primed participants would have characteristically absolutist responses on the EPQ. But the lack of similar effects for emotional valence and religion on the two subscales of the EPQ is supported by the low correlation between the two subscales of idealism and relativism (Forsyth, 1980, p.178). However, much of the research on religion and on the morality of religion, especially in Christian tradition, has emphasized lower relativism, absolutism and the closely related fundamentalism (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel, 2008, p.826; Haan, Smith & Block, 1968, p.193, McCleary, Quillivan, Foster & Williams, 2011); therefore, it is surprising that religion did not have a main effect or an interaction effect with valence on the relativism subscale. I suggest that this result may be at least partly due to the characteristics of the population studied in this particular experiment. This sample was extremely religious as measured by the intrinsic scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). A sample containing a variety of intrinsic religiosity scores would allow for more meaningful comparison of "more intrinsic" and "less intrinsic" participants.

It may also be due to a possible weakness in the priming mechanism. Differences between religiously and nonreligiously primed conditions on the word stem completion task, a manipulation check, approached significance but did not quite reach it. I suspect that the characteristics of the environment of the study, which took place at a highly religious evangelical college, affected the prime. I believe that religion as topic is already primed on a daily basis for this sample through religious events, religious discussion, and shared religious identity. Therefore, it is difficult to further prime only some participants to be thinking about religion. It may also be that the primes chosen were not sufficiently religious enough to act as strong primes, but that is unlikely given the explicitly religious nature of Scripture. The significant interaction effect of religion and emotion on idealism suggests that reading Scripture is an effective method of priming. Future research should further explore primes of religious texts. Studies using this type of prime are not common.

However, intrinsic religiosity was associated with lower relativism. Extrinsic religiosity was associated with increased relativism. These correlations lend more partial support to the link that I predicted between religiosity and absolutism. These correlations specifically support a relationship between trait religiosity and relativism. Religious orientation is a trait variable, in that people tend to be intrinsically and extrinsically oriented toward religion in a stable, trait-like way. This study found that trait intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity have opposite relationships with relativism scores. Given the documented differences between

intrinsically religious people and extrinsically religious people (Allport & Ross, 1967), this relationship is not surprising.

I also found only partial support for my second hypothesis that emotional valence would affect EPQ scores. Emotion did not have a main effect on either the idealism or relativism subscales. However, as stated above, the interaction between religion and emotion did have a significant affect on the idealism scale. More research is needed to explore the relationship between primed emotion and the EPQ. There may be specific emotions that would affect idealism and relativism more strongly. For example, work on disgust as a significant moral emotion when judging moral scenarios (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012) may extend to moral decision-making as measured by the EPQ. Also, work with different emotional primes may yield different results. In particular, the Robert Frost poem “Carpe Diem” may have not been as positive as Psalm 89, which may have confounded my results. In addition, emotions primed through hypnosis or videos (Ugazio, Lamm & Singer, 2012) may affect moral reasoning differently than emotions primed through text.

I did not find support for the hypothesis that the religious primes would only significantly influence responses to the EPQ for individuals high in intrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity was not a strong covariant for relativism or idealism scores. The most likely reason for this lack of connection is the nature of the population studied in this experiment. Intrinsic religiosity scores were very high, $M = 32.122$. The possible intrinsic scores range from 8-40. Intrinsic religiosity may be a stronger covariant in the relationship between religion and the EPQ in a sample with more varied intrinsic scores. It would be much more meaningful to separate

participants into groups of more intrinsically religious and less intrinsically religious in a sample with a wider variety of intrinsic religiosity. A significant difference in the effect of a religious prime between these two groups would be more likely than in a more homogenous sample such as the one used in this study.

Lastly, I did not find support for the hypothesis that cross-cultural experience would be related to higher relativism scores. However, the nature of this relationship is far from clear. Given the measurement I used for cross-cultural experience, these results are not surprising. I used a very simplistic measure of cross-cultural experience; namely, whether or not the participant had spent any length of time, for any reason, outside of the United States. But the wide variety of experiences are not qualitatively or quantitatively the same; therefore, it should not be expected that all cross-cultural experiences would have the same relationship to relativism scores. More specifically, I believe that cross-cultural experiences that involve months or years (as opposed to week-long short term missions trips, for example) of studying and/or living in another country outside of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe would be more strongly associated with higher relativism scores.

There are several general limitations of this particular study that may have affected these results. First, based on the population represented in this particular sample, it is unknown what effect, if any, religion and emotional valence may have on a more diverse sample. More specifically, religion and emotion may affect responses to the EPQ differently for non-Christian samples, including both samples of non-religious people and people of different faiths.

Also, the EPQ is a measure of moral decision-making that cannot be applied to moral behavior or predict people's actions in moral dilemmas. The EPQ uses hypothetical statements to capture moral thinking. Responses to these types of statements must be only cautiously applied to predictions of moral reasoning in real-life situations (Haviv & Leman, 2002, p.122). However, as an abstract measure, the EPQ is valuable in comparing how people believe they reason about moral issues to how they act in 'real-life'. The results of this study may only be generalized to members of the population measured and their moral decision-making based on idealism and relativism specifically.

In conclusion, priming religion and emotion has at least a small effect on idealism as measured by the EPQ for religious college students. In this population, extrinsic religiosity positively correlates with relativism while intrinsic religiosity negatively correlates with relativism. Further research, especially with more diverse samples, may illuminate possible relationships between primed religion and emotion and the relativism subscale as well as the moderating effects of intrinsic religiosity and cross-cultural experience.

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