



The dual-process theory of moral judgment does not deny that people can make compromise judgments

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Guzmán et al. (1) show that people can make compromise moral judgments balancing deontological and utilitarian considerations. They make innovative use of dilemmas with more than two options, including compromise options. I commend the authors on their valuable research and accept most of their conclusions. However, the authors frame their research using the dual-process theory (DPT) of moral judgment (2–4) as a foil, reflecting a misunderstanding of that theory.

According to the authors, the DPT says that people cannot make compromise judgments when deontological and utilitarian considerations conflict. The DPT makes no such claim. On the contrary, prior research within the DPT's framework has examined how people integrate deontological and utilitarian considerations in their judgments. One study (5), not cited by Guzmán et al., showed that participants' judgments respond systematically to varying probabilities and magnitudes of outcomes, even though their judgments are not reliably utilitarian. This is consistent with Guzmán et al.'s "Prediction 2." Another study (4) contrasted "all things considered" judgments with judgments based on participants' feelings about the action or on cost–benefit calculations. Results were "consistent with our hypothesis that all things considered judgments involve the integration of competing valuations based respectively on utilitarian assessments and emotional responses" (p. 4744). Both studies implicate the ventromedial prefrontal cortex in the integration of these decision variables, corresponding to Guzmán et al.'s "moral tradeoff system." Our participants were not offered compromise options, but all theory and data indicate that they would have found such options attractive. The DPT certainly does not rule this out.

This unfortunate misunderstanding stems from the authors' reading of a paper (6) containing speculation about why certain moral dilemmas are puzzling: Many moral decisions involve tradeoffs, but why do some, such as the classic footbridge dilemma, fuel extended philosophical debate? We

wrote: "Dilemmas arise when competing cognitive systems yield non-negotiable answers to questions that are not independently adjudicable" (p. 275). Pushing someone in front of a trolley will feel wrong even if it saves a million lives. Likewise, a narrow cost–benefit analysis will unequivocally favor saving more lives, no matter how awful the means. Thus, we metaphorically described the cognitive subsystems posited by the DPT as stubborn negotiators, convinced of the absolute rightness of their respective positions. Guzmán et al. have misunderstood this metaphor, taking it to mean that people—and not the subsystems that influence their judgments—are incapable of integrating these opposing responses into a compromise judgment.

I note also that the "non-negotiable" deontological response is thought to be triggered by the use of "personal force" (7, 8), which is absent in Guzmán et al.'s dilemmas.

Scientific critics rarely communicate in advance with the targets of their criticism to ensure that their understanding of the (apparently) opposing theory is accurate. Advocates of "adversarial collaboration" (9, 10) recommend that we reconsider this practice, both to avoid misunderstandings and, when genuine disagreements persist, to produce collaborative research that more effectively moves the field forward. The present case illustrates the value of this underutilized approach.

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