



Understanding Moral Judgements on Giving

A Preliminary Analysis

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Research Questions

- How do individuals make moral judgements about giving time and money?
- What is the relationship between social class and moral judgements?
- The topic of 'giving' cuts across disciplinary boundaries

Previous Studies

- Two analytical pitfalls:
 - a) social reductionism: by identifying individuals' social positions, we can impute their moral motives for giving (e.g., middle class – individualism, working class – solidarity)
 - b) radical individualism: individuals are guided only by their values and beliefs, making moral decisions in a social vacuum (i.e., class is a redundant category)

- (a) tends to be associated with sociology – inflates the importance of class
 - but class does not determine moral concerns, commitments and values
- (b) tends to be associated with moral philosophy – inflates the importance of ethical ideas
 - but everyday life cannot be simply constructed by free will

Research Approach


- Aim: how to combine social structures with moral decision making
- Identify what individuals regard as their ultimate and everyday concerns and commitments (such as family, work and social values)
- Explore how individuals dovetail or navigate their concerns and commitments given their social circumstances (such as class, gender, age and ethnicity)
- Examine how individuals' philanthropic activities fit with their everyday practices and relationships:
 - what moral meanings do they attached to giving?

Research Design

- 41 semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2008 – July 2009, each interview lasted on average about 2 hours
- About 25% in upper middle income, 25% in lower middle class and 50% in working class (based on occupation, education and family background)
- More female than male interviewees
- Participants had life experience
- Interview format: life history, then focus on giving time and money

	Dominant Ultimate Concerns and Commitments	Stance towards Society	Philanthropic Activities	Normative Judgements
Group A	Family, Friends and Local Community	Embedded and content within their own micro-worlds, and contribute little to civil society	Intense social life reduces engagement with other, family and community focused, the socialising aspect of giving (sponsoring family and friends)	Sympathy for others' suffering, but confine giving to dovetail with family and social concerns, social belonging and connection
Group B	Work Satisfaction and Achievements	Strategic changes, and minimal participation social collectives	Dedication to work confines giving to certain moments, the convenience of charity, strategic and personal (giving to interest-related causes)	Give time and money, but not themselves, ambivalent about charities (sceptical but compassionate), egoism, pleasure, reciprocity, recognition
Group C	Social Values and Justice	Unsettled and dissatisfied, unwilling to accept compromises, and subverting society	A sense of calling, give themselves to causes, fuse personal identity with the cause (critical of their own participation and of the charities)	Express justice and sympathy for distant others, matter of duty despite the heavy burden, right thing to do, want to contribute meaningfully

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Class and Morality

- Social structures can corrupt moral sentiments and judgements, partly through semi-/ unconscious thinking:
 - a) *akrasia* - although an individual knows that it is good to give to a street beggar or a charity, she doesn't because she isn't motivated enough:
 - e.g., lacking symbolic capital, recognition and status, a working class individual is cautious of losing symbolic power imbued in money – a thrifty upbringing shapes her spending patterns
 - it is easier for a middle class individual to give up some symbolic power by donating to others

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b) *self-deception* – an individual semi-consciously deceives herself into thinking that she is giving, or that she doesn't need to give:

e.g., a middle class individual perceives paying her son's fees to a public school as charitable giving, though she is actually passing her cultural capital onto her son

- a working class individual feels that he is donating money by buying clothes at charity shops, though he is actually trying to save money

Some Questions for Discussion

1. How do you think social class or status affect giving?
2. What are the distinct patterns of giving between the middle and working classes?
3. What other concerns and commitments do you think people have?
4. Why do people tend to give time rather than give money?