



Moral emotions and partnership



Jürgen Bracht^a, Tobias Regner^{b,*}

^a University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom

^b Max Planck Institute of Economics, Jena, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 January 2013

Received in revised form 24 September 2013

Accepted 27 September 2013

Available online 14 October 2013

JEL classifications:

C70

C91

D03

D82

Keywords:

Social preferences

Pro-social behaviour

Experiments

Psychological game theory

Guilt

Shame

ABSTRACT

Actual behaviour is influenced in important ways by moral emotions, for instance guilt or shame. The framework of dynamic psychological games allows the economic modelling of such emotions. Our experimental study uses psychological scales to measure individuals' dispositions to experience guilt/shame and analyses the role these emotions play in a partnership situation that features moral hazard.

We find that – in addition to second-order beliefs and promises – individuals' disposition to guilt (specifically, their proneness to respond in an evaluative way to personal transgressions) is an important determinant of pro-social behaviour.

© 2013 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Our study examines experimentally how moral emotions – specifically guilt and shame – affect pro-social behaviour. It connects recent insights about moral emotions from psychology and economics. Psychological scales (Tangney et al., 2000; Cohen et al., 2011) reliably identify individuals' dispositions to experience guilt and shame, while the framework of dynamic psychological games (Battigalli and Dufwenberg, 2009) allows the economic modelling of such feelings. We combine these approaches and analyse the role moral emotions play in a partnership situation that features moral hazard.

Guilt and shame are two different ways in which people acknowledge an awareness that they have violated a norm or a value that they take to be important or significant. Guilt is a critical voice; it is our conscience. Shame is concerned with saving or losing face; it is concerned with appearance. We conjecture that people have different innate propensities to experience these emotions. In our study we measure these emotional traits a week before the experimental sessions, conduct a mini trust game and test whether the traits matter. In addition, our experimental design allows us to identify the effect of exposure (the perfect observability of an opportunistic action) and of different degrees of pre-play communication.

Our main findings are a correlation between guilt proneness and pro-social behaviour, and a substantial and significant exposure effect (10% more cooperation). These results add to the insights from Charness and Dufwenberg (2006). They found

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 3641686635.

E-mail address: regner@econ.mpg.de (T. Regner).

that pre-play communication, in particular promises, foster trust and cooperation in a partnership. We find that also individual traits make people behave pro-socially in such a context. Furthermore, our evidence is consistent with the guilt aversion model of Battigalli and Dufwenberg (2007). Subjects exhibit an aversion to disappoint someone (simple guilt) and they also seem to dislike others' inferences that they intentionally disappointed someone (guilt from blame).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 provides some background on the literature on moral emotions, from the social psychology as well as from the economics perspective. In Section 3 we describe our study and derive behavioural predictions. Results are presented in Section 4 and Section 5 concludes.

2. Moral emotions in psychology and economics

Scholars in social psychology agree that the process from moral standards/norms to actual behaviour is influenced in important ways by *moral emotions* (see, among others, Eisenberg, 2000; Tangney and Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007).¹ Individual differences in how people experience moral emotions likely play key roles in determining behaviour in real-life contexts. Moreover, the impact of moral emotions is not limited to actual behaviour but extends to the anticipation of likely emotional reactions when behavioural alternatives are considered (Tangney et al., 2007).

Among moral emotions shame and guilt are from the family of self-conscious emotions. They are evoked by self-reflection, an awareness that one has failed or done something wrong. Both shame and guilt are characterised by feelings of distress arising in response to personal transgressions (see, for instance, Baumeister et al., 1994; Tangney and Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007; Wolf et al., 2010). In everyday conversation the terms 'shame' and 'guilt' are often used interchangeably. Attempts to differentiate between shame and guilt focus on two categories: a distinction based on (i) whether the emotion-eliciting event is considered as a failure of self or behaviour, and (ii) the nature of the transgression (public versus private).

Lewis (1971) argues that shame is a negative evaluation of the transgressor's entire self that follows a moral transgression (I did that awful thing), whereas guilt is a negative evaluation of the transgressor's specific behaviour that follows a moral transgression (I did that awful thing). Both processes lead to negative feelings, but the stakes are different. While shame is about the exposed core of one's self, guilt is limited to the specific behaviour one has committed. According to Tangney et al. (2007) empirical research supports this differential emphasis on self versus behaviour. Guilt and shame lead to very different emotional experiences and very distinct patterns of motivations and subsequent behaviour. Generally, guilt is regarded as the more adaptive emotion as it motivates people to correct their mistakes and apologise for them. On the other hand, shame is considered to be often maladaptive (see, for instance, Tangney et al., 2007; Stuewig et al., 2010) causing people to ignore the consequences of their transgression and withdraw (Tangney and Dearing, 2002).

Benedict (1946) distinguished shame and guilt by the type of situations that invoke them. A public context is associated with shame, a private one with guilt. Such a positive relationship between the reporting of shame and the extent of public exposure of a wrongful act has been found by Combs et al. (2010) among others. However, the public/private distinction is not undisputed in the literature as Tangney et al. (2007) refer to empirical evidence that contradicts it.

The Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3) by Tangney et al. (2000) is arguably the most widely used way to elicit proneness to guilt and shame. It consists of 16 real life scenarios in which something goes wrong. For each situation subjects are presented a list of possible reactions (among them a shame and a guilt reaction) and for each they are asked to rate how likely they are to react in that way. The TOSCA-3 relies on the self-behaviour distinction between shame and guilt. Guilt responses are characterised by negative behaviour-evaluations (thinking "I made a mistake", for example), as well as repair action tendencies (like apologising). Shame responses are characterised by negative self-evaluations (thinking "I am a terrible person") and withdrawal action tendencies (e.g., hiding). The TOSCA-3 contains evaluative as well as behavioural responses to transgressions, yet it does not differentiate between them within the guilt/shame sub scales. However, Wolf et al. (2010) show that there is a theoretical and empirical distinction between evaluative and behavioural responses.

Based on these insights Cohen et al. (2011) developed the Guilt And Shame Proneness scale (GASP), an innovative scale that incorporates the public-private and the self-behaviour conceptualizations simultaneously, and additionally distinguishes evaluative responses from action orientations. They assume that private transgressions trigger feelings of guilt, while public transgressions trigger feelings of shame. Hence, their guilt scenarios are all set in the private domain, and the shame scenarios are always public situations. In total the GASP contains 16 real life scenarios. Subjects are asked to imagine they were in that situation and indicate the likelihood that they would react in the way described at the end of the scenario. For guilt there are 4 scenarios with negative behaviour-evaluations (NBE) and 4 scenarios with repair responses (REP). For shame there are 4 scenarios with negative self-evaluations (NSE) and 4 scenarios for withdrawal responses (WIT). See Appendix A for details of the GASP questionnaire.

In economics *belief-dependant models of social preferences* are one approach to explain other-regarding behaviour. They use the framework of psychological games pioneered by Geanakoplos et al. (1989) and Battigalli and Dufwenberg (2009). This allows to consider various emotions by incorporating higher order beliefs and actions into the utility function. The underlying idea is that "[e]motions ... are triggered by beliefs" (Elster, 1998). Charness and Dufwenberg (2006) illustrate

¹ According to Tangney et al. (2007) moral emotions influence the connection between moral standards and moral behaviour. Haidt (2003) distinguishes four categories of moral emotions along the two dimensions of focus (self versus other) and valence (positive versus negative). Examples of negatively valenced 'self-conscious' emotions are shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Negatively valenced 'other-oriented' emotions include righteous anger, contempt, and disgust. Pride is a positively valenced 'self-conscious' emotion, while elevation and gratitude are positively valenced 'other-focused' emotions.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7244976>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7244976>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)