# Moral Objectivism and a Punishing God ***Supplementary Materials***

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# **STUDY 1**

**Participants**

**Power analysis.**There were no previous correlational studies on our variables of interest. However, Yilmaz and Bahçekapili [(2015)](https://paperpile.com/c/CrEUjk/5SUV/?noauthor=1) found that moral subjectivism was negatively correlated with measures of intrinsic religiosity (*r* = -.36) intuitive religious belief (*r* = -.26), and belief in the existence of God (*r* = -.14). This suggests our chosen medium-sized effect (.30) to be appropriate.

**Table.** Religious affiliation of participants in Study 1

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Affiliation | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Protestant Christian | 69 | 36.5 | 36.5 |
| Roman Catholic | 46 | 24.3 | 60.8 |
| Evangelical Christian | 23 | 12.2 | 73.0 |
| Other Christian | 21 | 11.1 | 84.1 |
| Jewish | 5 | 2.6 | 86.8 |
| Muslim | 2 | 1.1 | 87.8 |
| Hindu | 1 | .5 | 88.4 |
| Buddhist | 3 | 1.6 | 89.9 |
| Other | 19 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 189 | 100.0 |  |

**Materials**

Five-Item Moral Relativism Scale[(based on Forsyth, 1980)](https://paperpile.com/c/CrEUjk/tCb4/?prefix=based%20on). \* = Reverse coded.

* Moral standards should be seen as being unique to each culture.
* Different cultures’ moral standards cannot be compared as to “rightness”.
* Questions of what is moral for everyone can never be resolved, since what is moral or immoral is determined by one’s culture.
* There are some moral principles that are so important that they should be a part of every code of ethics in every culture.\*
* There is only one set of correct moral principles, it is universal, and it applies everywhere, to everyone, and under any circumstance.\*

5-item Duke University Religiosity (DUREL) Scale [(Koenig & Büssing, 2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/CrEUjk/wpFI)

1. How often do you attend church or other religious meetings? [organizational religious activity]

*1 - Never; 2 - Once a year or less; 3 - A few times a year; 4 - A few times a month; 5 - Once a week; 6 - More than once/week*

1. How often do you spend time in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation or Bible study? [non-organizational religious activity]

*1 - Rarely or never; 2 - A few times a month; 3 - Once a week; 4 - Two or more times/week; 5 - Daily; 6 - More than once a day*

1. In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e., God). [intrinsic religiosity\_1]

*1 - Definitely not true; 2 - Tends not to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me*

1. My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life. [intrinsic religiosity\_2]

*1 - Definitely not true; 2 - Tends not to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me*

1. I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life. [intrinsic religiosity\_3]

*1 - Definitely not true; 2 - Tends not to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me*

# **STUDY 2**

**Participants**

**Power Analysis.** While this paper was under review we became aware of Yilmaz and Bahçekapili (2016), which reports a study relevant to the one we undertake here. They found a medium/large sized effect (*ηp*2 = .93), whereby priming both religious and secular punishing concepts increased prosocial attitudes. This supports our selection of a medium effect size for our power analysis.

**Table.** Religious affiliation of participants in Study 2

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Affiliation | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Protestant Christian | 89 | 33.2 | 33.2 |
| Roman Catholic | 52 | 19.4 | 52.6 |
| Evangelical Christian | 15 | 5.6 | 58.2 |
| Other Christian | 43 | 16 | 74.3 |
| Jewish | 8 | 3 | 77.2 |
| Muslim | 2 | .7 | 78.0 |
| Hindu | 2 | .7 | 78.7 |
| Buddhist | 6 | 2.2 | 81.0 |
| Other | 51 | 19.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 268 | 100 |  |

**Materials**

3-item Moral Objectivism Scale

In Study 1, we took relativism as the reverse of objectivism (from a folk psychological perspective). However, in Study 2 we tested for objectivism directly with the following new 3-item scale:

1. There exists a single moral code that is applicable to everyone, regardless of any individual person’s beliefs or cultural identity.
2. If two people really disagree about a particular moral problem then at most one of them can be correct, since moral problems cannot have multiple correct answers.
3. It is possible to compare different cultures by a single, universal standard of moral rightness.

Not only did this 3-item scale differ from the measure used in Study 1 by testing objectivism directly (as opposed to testing for rejection of relativism), it was also not based on previous measures. We were concerned that existing measures, such as the 5-item scale adapted from Forsyth [(1980)](https://paperpile.com/c/CrEUjk/tCb4/?noauthor=1), did not capture metaethical views in a precise way, potentially limiting what we can infer from their use in this context. Take, for example, the statement "There are some moral principles that are so important they should be a part of every code of ethics in every culture." This can be interpreted as a normative claim expressing one's attitude, rather than a principled position about the status of morality. Similarly, the statement "Moral standards should be seen as being unique to each culture" can be taken to be a descriptive claim, which is entirely consistent with being an objectivist about morality. In other words, one can think that, descriptively, espoused moral standards are unique to cultures, while holding that at most one (or none) of these moral cultures has a handle on the actual, objective moral truth. So, some may wonder, as we began to wonder, whether the scale used in Study 1 adequately assessed metaethical beliefs. In light of these interpretive possibilities for Forsyth scale statements, we devised our scale as an independent measure for investigating metaethical views.[[1]](#footnote-0) In a pretest, these statements were given to participants (n = 114) in random order. The objectivism scale items were highly internally consistent (Cronbach’s α .85). In a separate study (n = 291), answers to the objectivism scale were also found to correlate with a standard measure of objectivism using a disagreement task, *r*(112) = .56, *p* < .001.

**Results**

**Table.** Means and Standard Deviations for Objectivism across six conditions in Study 2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Condition: | Mean: | SD: |
| Divine-Punishing | 3.98 | 1.91 |
| Divine-Loving | 3.99 | 1.65 |
| Divine-Neutral | 3.80 | 1.36 |
| Neutral-Punishing | 3.72 | 1.45 |
| Neutral-Loving | 3.60 | 1.68 |
| Neutral-Neutral | 3.67 | 1.34 |

# **STUDY 3**

**Participants**

**Table.** Religious affiliation of participants in Study 3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Affiliation | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Protestant Christian | 55 | 33.3 | 33.3 |
| Roman Catholic | 37 | 22.4 | 55.8 |
| Evangelical Christian | 9 | 5.5 | 61.2 |
| Other Christian | 31 | 18.8 | 80.0 |
| Jewish | 3 | 1.8 | 81.8 |
| Muslim | 3 | 1.8 | 83.6 |
| Hindu | 5 | 3.0 | 86.7 |
| Buddhist | 4 | 2.4 | 89.1 |
| Other | 18 | 10.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 165 | 100.0 |  |

**Materials**

14 item Loving and Punishing God scale [(from Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/CrEUjk/0XRh/?prefix=from)

We are interested in how you conceive of God. To what extent do you agree with the following statements describing God or the Divine? [7pt agreement scale]

*Loving:*

* The word "**forgiving**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**loving**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**compassionate**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**gentle**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**kind**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**comforting**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**peaceful**" applies to my conception of God.

*Punishing:*

* The word "**vengeful**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**harsh**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**fearsome**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**angry**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**punishing**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**jealous**" applies to my conception of God.
* The word "**terrifying**" applies to my conception of God.

A factor analysis was performed on these 14 items. The minimum amount of data was satisfied, with a ratio of approximately 12 participants per item. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .89 (exceeding the commonly recommended value of .6), and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant, χ2 (91) = 1597.49, *p* < .001. A principal component analysis was conducted, using varimax rotation, with factor 1 (eigenvalue = 4.94) and factor 2 (eigenvalue = 4.54) accounting for 68% of the variance (all other factor eigenvalues < 0.7). All Loving God items loaded on Factor 1, and all Punishing God items loaded on factor 2. There were no cross loadings.

**Results**

**Analysis of Atheists.**This study yielded our only marginally significant result for atheists. In all, 167 atheists and agnostics completed this study. Of these, 10 failed a basic comprehension check at the beginning (6 in the absolute condition, 1 in the relative condition, and 3 in the control condition), and another 13 were removed for failing a manipulation check after the prime (6 from the absolute condition, 7 from the relative condition) leaving 144 atheists and agnostics for the analyses below (53 women; mean age = 30.31, *SD* = 8.08, range: 19-58), distributed across conditions as follows: 44 in objective, 47 in relative, and 53 in control.

There was a marginal main effect of condition on atheists’ conception of God as a loving being, *F*(2,141) = 2.94, *p* = .056, *ηp*2 = .040. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicated that the mean score for Loving God in the Objective condition (*M* = 4.38, *SD* = 1.91) was significantly higher than in the Control condition (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 1.52, *p* = .049, Cohen’s *d* = .49). One possible explanation for this effect is *fear driven rationalization*. After all, if morality is objective and God exists, then denying God’s existence may result in punishment. With this in mind, atheists might be motivated to think that God is, after all, loving and merciful. But this result should be taken with caution.

**References**

[Forsyth, D. R. (1980). A taxonomy of ethical ideologies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*(1), 175–184.](http://paperpile.com/b/CrEUjk/tCb4)

[Koenig, H. G., & Büssing, A. (2010). The duke university religion index (DUREL): A five-item measure for use in epidemological studies. *Religions*, *1*(1), 78–85.](http://paperpile.com/b/CrEUjk/wpFI)

[Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2011). Mean gods make good people: Different views of God predict cheating behavior. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *21*(2), 85–96.](http://paperpile.com/b/CrEUjk/0XRh)

[Yilmaz, O., & Bahçekapili, H. G. (2015). Without God, everything is permitted? The reciprocal influence of religious and meta-ethical beliefs. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *58*, 95–100.](http://paperpile.com/b/CrEUjk/5SUV)

1. Similar concerns can be raised regarding some of the items used by Yilmaz and Bahçekapili (2015). For example, the statement “What is moral varies on the basis of context and society” can again be interpreted as a descriptive claim, and the statement “If morality were to differ from person to person, it would be impossible for people to live together” is a conditional claim that has no straightforward metaethical implication (one natural way to understand this claim is referring to the need for people to share local norms, without any implication for the status of morality) (Yilmaz and Bahçekapili, 2015, Supplementary Materials). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)