

Moral Judgment Is Sensitive to Bargaining Power

Participant-visible method context. Results, discussion, captions, and the target figure are excluded.

Participants The preregistration site is OSF (<https://osf.io/gdpw7>). Four hundred two U.S.-based participants were recruited from Prolific, and 16 participants were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check, as preregistered (final sample age range = 19–85 years; $M = 44.7$; $SD = 13.7$; 195 women; 187 men; four others). We used the following filtering criteria: Participants located in the United States; balanced sample (male and female participants); first language is English; approval rate: 98–100; exclude participants from previous related studies; and rate limiting (which gives priority access to the study to less experienced participants) was deactivated. Participants were paid \$0.70 for 5 min of their time (\$8.40/hr). As described in the preregistration form, this sample size was calculated to achieve adequate power ($\beta = 0.8$ with $\alpha = .05$) for a comparison (two tailed) between two independent means (independent groups of equal size) to detect an effect size $d = 0.3$ taking into account typical exclusion rates (based on attention checks) for online samples. Power analyses were conducted using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) and description of power analyses for subsequent studies are available on each study's preregistration form.

Materials Participants were presented with seven vignettes (an additional vignette was also used to check attention) constructed according to the following structure: Two characters can perform a mutually beneficial but unpleasant action, one of them has higher bargaining power, the other has worse bargaining power. The bargaining power asymmetry is mainly manipulated via the value attributed to the outcome at stake by each party (well, deal, paintings, canoe, boss, stadium), and, for one vignette, via the parties' available alternatives (cab).³ Participants were asked: How morally appropriate would it be for X to ask Y to do Z? They provided a rating of moral appropriateness by indicating a number (from 0 to 100) using a labeled slider (0 = extremely inappropriate; 25 = somewhat inappropriate; 50 = neither appropriate nor inappropriate; 75 = somewhat appropriate; 100 = extremely appropriate).

In an earlier version of this article, we referred to our manipulations as manipulations of “outside options” understood in the game-theoretic sense of the payoff/utility that each party would get in the absence of agreement. Formally, all our vignettes—whether bargaining power is manipulated via stakes or available alternatives—can be modeled using the same approach (see Supplemental Material): Two parties with asymmetric bargaining power due to asymmetric disagreement payoffs/utilities (“outside options”) can reach a mutually beneficial agreement if one of them incurs a larger cost (unpleasant action) than the other. We decided to drop the “outside options” terminology, which connotes “available alternatives” and obscures the difference between “stakes” and “alternatives,” to avoid confusion. We discuss this at length in the Supplemental Material.

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100 = extremely appropriate). For each vignette, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the “high bargaining power” condition, X is the character with higher bargaining power and Y is the character with lower bargaining power. In the “low bargaining power” condition, X is the character with lower bargaining power, and Y is the character with higher bargaining power. The vignettes were identical in both conditions, only the order of the names in the moral judgment question differed between conditions (i.e., X replaced with Y and Y replaced with X). Vignettes varied in the nature of the action to be performed (e.g., jump in the cold water, wait in line), the nature of the outcome at stake (e.g., valuable item, financial bonus), the relationship between the characters (e.g., colleagues, friends, strangers), and the context of the interaction (e.g., work, leisure, travel). We used common American male first names for all characters to prevent any potential influence on results of other factors (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status) unrelated to our hypotheses. All vignettes described real-life social scenarios. Vignettes are provided below. Well. Frank accidentally dropped his wedding ring down the well. Sam accidentally dropped a cheap watch down the well. To get their items back, one of them has to go down the well and get muddy while the other holds the rope. Cab. James can get home in about 2 hours with the train. Bob can get home in a bit more than 1 hour with the train. They decide to take a cab with the company's credit card instead. The cab can drop either of them in 30 minutes and the other one 30 minutes after that. Deal. Matt and Daniel are colleagues of equal rank working on an important deal. If the deal goes through, Matt will get a \$100,000 bonus as he is the one who generated the lead. Daniel wants the deal to go through but he will not get a bonus. Closing the deal requires one of them to immediately take a cab to the airport to get the client's signature before the client's flight takes off. Meanwhile the other simply needs to go upstairs to inform the boss who manages the client relationship. Paintings.

Will and Joe have both been painting outdoors. Will has been working on his painting for months, Joe has been working on his painting for half an hour. They left their paintings up and went to get lunch. It starts to rain. One of them needs to sprint as fast as possible to save the paintings before they are ruined while the other takes shelter from the rain. Canoe. Michael and David are sharing a canoe. The only items inside the canoe are Michael's very expensive camera equipment and David's lunch bag. The canoe begins to rock after descending the rapids and one of them needs to jump in the cold water immediately to save it from tipping over. Boss. Tom and Mark prepare a birthday party at the office for their boss. Tom really needs the party to go well because he plans to ask for a promotion soon. Mark is starting a new job at a different company next month anyway. One of them has to pick up the cake from the bakery down the street. Meanwhile the other needs to spend an hour in traffic to collect the present in the city center. Stadium. Paul and Steve are buying tickets for the football game. Paul has a coupon worth \$90 and can get a ticket for \$10. Steve will have to pay the full price of \$100. One of them has to stand in line at the boutique for one hour to buy the tickets while the other eats an ice cream in the sun. Attention Check. Chris and Andy are at the restaurant and are almost done with their dinner. This is an attention check. Please ignore the next question and click on number 94 on the slider below

to demonstrate that you are paying attention. One of them needs to pay the bill while the other calls the hotel to cancel their reservation. In Well, Frank's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, Frank would lose his wedding ring (high value), but Sam would only lose his cheap watch (low value). In Cab, James' bargaining power was lower because his best alternative was to get home in 2 hours with the train (worse alternative) while Bob's best alternative was to get home in 1 hour (better alternative). In Deal, Matt's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, in addition to the deal not going through, Matt would lose a \$100,000 bonus (high value). Daniel, however, did not expect a bonus (low value). In Paintings, Will's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, he would lose a painting he had been working on for months (high value). Joe would only lose a painting he had been working on for half an hour (low value). In Canoe, Michael's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, he would lose his very expensive camera equipment (high value). David would only lose his lunch bag (low value). In Boss, Tom's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, in addition to a ruined party for his boss, his chances of getting a promotion would be lower (high value). This was not the case for Mark, who is about to leave his job for another one (low value). In Stadium, Paul's bargaining power was lower because, in the absence of agreement, he would both miss the game and lose a coupon worth \$90 (high value). Steve would simply miss the game (low value).

Procedure The study was administered using Qualtrics. Participants were invited to participate in a study about social judgment and decision making. All participants read and completed a consent form. They entered their Prolific ID and read the instructions. Then they were presented with seven vignettes (one per page) and an attention check in a random order. For each vignette, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions and provided a judgment of moral appropriateness before proceeding to the next vignette. Next, participants could provide their age, gender, and any comments (in a text box) they had about the study. Finally, all participants were presented with a debriefing form. Following our preregistration, for each vignette, we performed a linear regression with condition as the independent variable. Then, we collapsed moral judgments for all vignettes and performed a mixed-effects linear regression with condition as our independent variable and random intercepts per participant and per vignette. We hypothesized that the same request (one character asking another character to perform a mutually beneficial but unpleasant action) would be perceived as more morally acceptable when the character making the request has more bargaining power than when the character making the request has less bargaining power.