Making Morality Impartial: An Experimental Investigation of the Veil of Ignorance

**Fact Sheet**

**Objective**

We are living in an age of increased moral disagreement and polarization. One explanation for this trend is partiality. People on one or both sides of contested social issue (abortion, COVID-19, climate change, etc.) do not give equal or adequate weight to the interests of all those concerned. Their views are based on bias or prejudice. Finding ways of increasing impartiality may therefore be one of the most important tasks that humanity currently faces. My project attempts to contribute to this task. In particular, I will investigate one particular device that philosophers have used to promote impartial reasoning, namely the so called “veil of ignorance” thought experiment — an attempt to abstract from knowledge about one’s gender, race, income and other morally irrelevant characteristics that might distort one’s
judgments.

Previous research has only focused on people’s actual choices behind the veil of ignorance. My project, in contrast, will investigate the methodological appropriateness of this thought experiment. (1) How robust is the VOI (i.e. to what extent are the judgments people arrive at by engaging in the thought experiment influenced by irrelevant factors)? (2) How effective is the VOI (i.e. to what extent does it fulfill the function it was supposed to fulfill)? (3) What are the larger philosophical implications of these findings?

The framework that I will use in investigating these questions is that of experimental philosophy. That is, I will run empirical studies on people’s intuitions to inform philosophical argumentation. Being supervised by leading experts at the Universities of Tokyo (outgoing phase), Graz (return phase), Oxford (secondment) and Auckland (secondment), my research has the potential to significantly impact a number of debates in both philosophy and psychology — and hopefully, it can also make a small contribution to making morality more impartial in public discourse.

**Fields of science**

- humanities ➔ philosophy, ethics and religion ➔ philosophy ➔ history of philosophy ➔ contemporary philosophy
- social sciences ➔ sociology ➔ social issues
- social sciences ➔ psychology
- medical and health sciences ➔ health sciences ➔ infectious diseases ➔ RNA viruses ➔ coronaviruses
- natural sciences ➔ earth and related environmental sciences ➔ atmospheric sciences ➔ climatology ➔ climatic changes

**Keywords**

- IMPARTIAL

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See other projects for this call

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UNIVERSITAET GRAZ

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Contact the organisation Website Participation in EU R&I programmes HORIZON collaboration network

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