

"It was the right decision because..." - Cultural and Personal Determinants of Ethical Justification



Tobias Gollan ¹

Anna Moser ¹

Maria Luisa Mendes Teixeira ²

Valerie Brandt ¹

¹ Department of Social Psychology, University of Hamburg, GER

² Centro de Ciências Sociais e Aplicadas, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, BRA

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Aims of the Study

Background



Method



Results



Discussion

- investigate justification of decisions in everyday dilemmas
 - à Develop scenarios that everyone has encountered or can easily identify with
- employ different measures of ethical content
 - à questionnaire and content analysis on free justificatory statements.
- investigate intercultural differences in justification
 - à gathering data from Brazil and Germany (Spain to come)
- investigate relationships between justification and personal values

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Everyday dilemmas

Background



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Respondents were described a scenario which required a decision:

„Recently, Mrs M. has worked overtime in order to take two days off next week. However, suddenly her department has to manage a great amount of work, so that her help would be useful for her colleagues.

Please imagine you were Mrs M. Do you still use your overtime next week as planned?

[Do you help your colleagues with the additional work]“

à 6 dilemmas, chosen from a pool of 30

à pretested for item difficulty and perceived realism

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A taxonomy of ethical principles

Background

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General assumption:

Every justificatory statement refers (at least implicitly) to one or more ethical principles.

Four basic ethical principles, based on practical philosophy:

The point of reference for evaluation of an action should be...

- Utilitarianism: ...the consequences of an action for all people affected by it.
- Deontology: ...the congruency with universal rules or norms of conduct.
- Hedonism: ...the happiness and dignity of the individual.
- Intuitionism: ...the individual's intuitive insight or conviction.

	Ends / consequences	Means / rules
Personal Focus	Hedonism	Intuitionism
General Focus	Utilitarianism	Deontology

Witte & Doll (1995); Gollan & Witte (2008)

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Measuring ethical content

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Prescriptive Attribution Questionnaire, 8-item-vers. (Q)

§ „Please indicate to what extent the following aspects were important in deciding X:“
[1: very important to 5: not important]

§ „I must do what brings advantages for myself.“

§ „I am simply sure that this action was appropriate.“

§ „This action brings a great benefit for all people affected by it.“

§ „There are social obligations that are relevant for evaluating this action.“

à 4 scores per dilemma (Hedonism, Deontology, Utilitarianism, Intuitionism)

Content analysis of Freeform statements (FF)

- „Please explain in a few lines why you think it was right to decide X“
- Each statement was content analyzed by 2 independent raters according to its ethical content

à 4 scores per dilemma; mean interrater correlations (**GER** / **BRA**):

- Hedonism: **.63** / **.52**
- Deontology: **.60** / **.53**
- Utilitarianism: **.64** / **.62**
- Intuitionism: **.22** / **.33**

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Measuring personal values

Background

Method

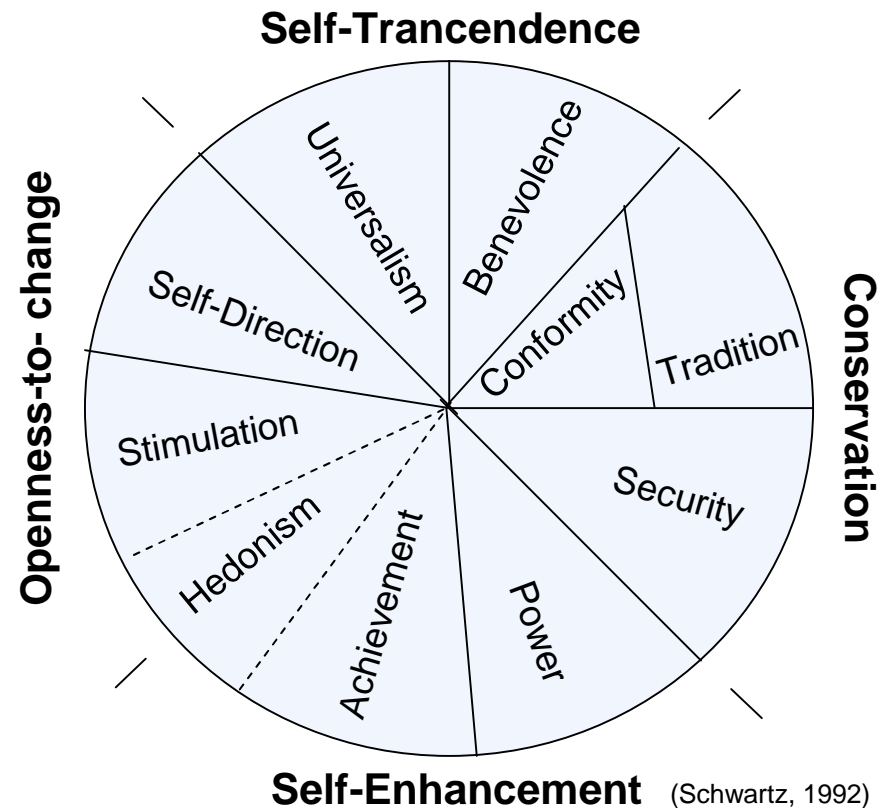
Results

Discussion

Portraits Values Questionnaire-21 (Schwartz et al., 2001)

§ „Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him. He likes to do things in his own original way. How much is this person like you or not like you?“
[1: not like me at all to
6: very much like me]

à 10 scores for
Schwartz' ten
value types



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The Sample

Online study / study sample:

§ Students at various Brazilian Universities

- § n=329
- § 210 female
- § mean age 23 years [sd=5.9]

§ Students at the University of Hamburg

- § n=138
- § 117 female
- § mean age 25.6 years [sd=5.15]

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Results: Convergence of measures

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Correlations between FF and Q scales

	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 4	Dilemma 5	Dilemma 6	mean
Hedonism							
Germany	.307**	.060	.226**	.122	.184*	.229**	.218*
Brazil	.172**	.075	.086	.216**	.097	.243**	.143**
Intuitionism							
Germany	.050	-.027	.077	.090	.022	.128	.194*
Brazil	.081	.001	-.020	-.065	.110*	.006	.060
Utilitarianism							
Germany	.037	.097	.257**	.252**	.263**	.151	.190*
Brazil	.109	.081	.091	.187**	.225**	.093	.214**
Deontology							
Germany	-.211	-.053	-.054	.392**	.078	.254**	.137
Brazil	.021	.016	.001	.164**	-.059	.105	.031

à Questionnaire items and coded ethical content of freeform statements do NOT converge

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Results: Stability across dilemmas

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Questionnaire (Q)	ends / consequences	means / rules
Personal Focus BRA GER	Hedonism .69 .60	Intuitionism .83 .82
General Focus BRA GER	Utilitarianism .66 .63	Deontology .69 .37

Freeform (FF)	ends / consequences	means / rules
Personal Focus BRA GER	Hedonism .06 .29	Intuitionism .21 -.32
General Focus BRA GER	Utilitarianism .08 .26	Deontology .36 .16

cronbach's α

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Results: Intercultural differences

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Questionnaire (Q)	ends / consequences	means / rules
Personal Focus BRA GER	Hedonism ** .48 (.61) .67 (.55) d=.33	Intuitionism ** -.61 (.59) -.43 (.53) d=.32
General Focus BRA GER	Utilitarianism * -.09 (.51) -.20 (.44) d=.23	Deontology ** .22 (.48) -.04 (.38) d=.60

Freeform (FF)	ends / consequences	means / rules
Personal Focus BRA GER	Hedonism ** .31 (.15) .42 (.19) d=.64	Intuitionism ** .29 (.16) .16 (.11) d=.95
General Focus BRA GER	Utilitarianism ** .14 (.12) .20 (.15) d=.39	Deontology ** .26 (.18) .21 (.15) d=.30

Means; sd in parentheses; d=effect sizes (Cohen's d); ** significant on a 1% level; * on a 5% level

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Ethical Positions (Q) and Values

Background



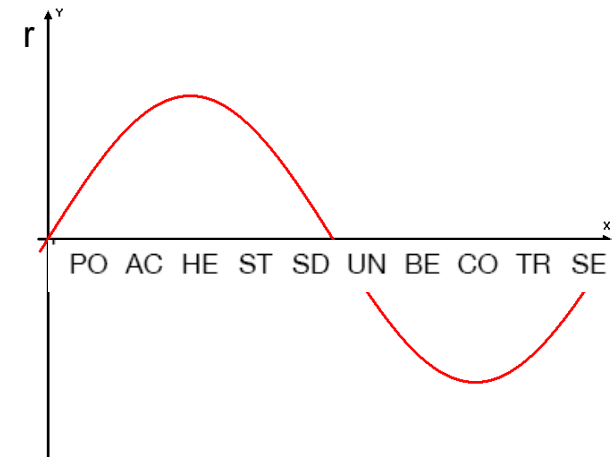
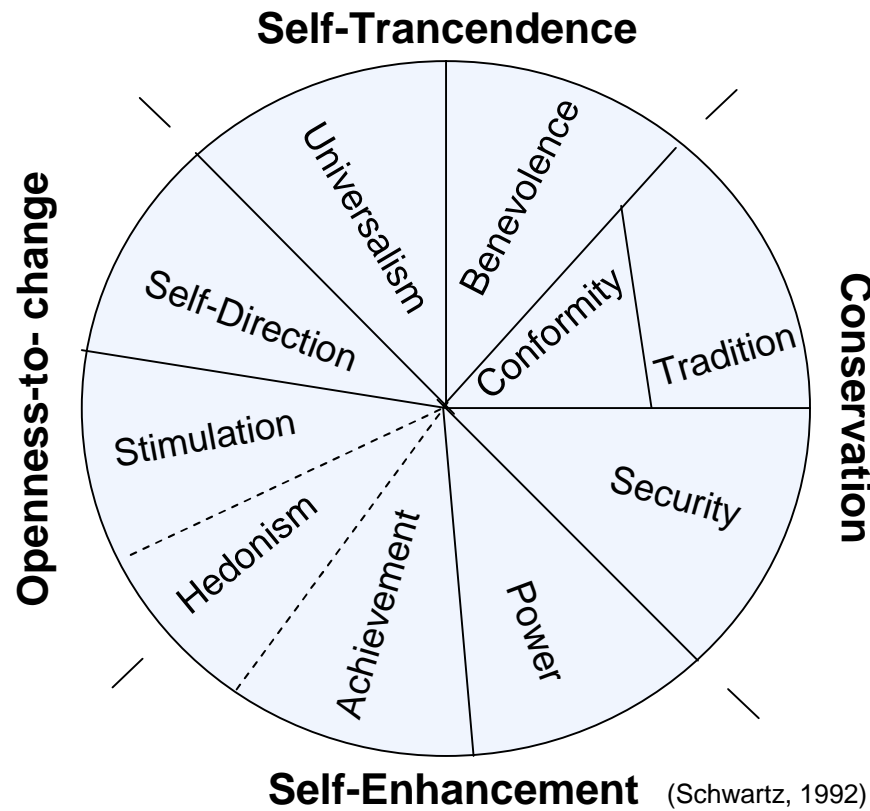
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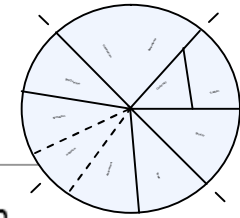
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Discussion



Ethical Positions (Q) and Values

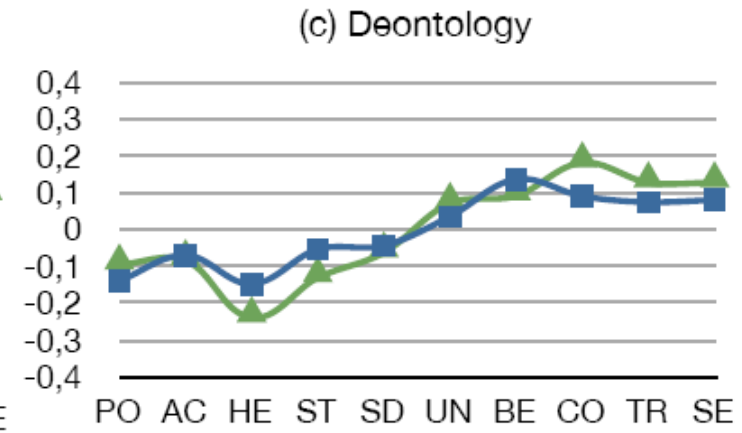
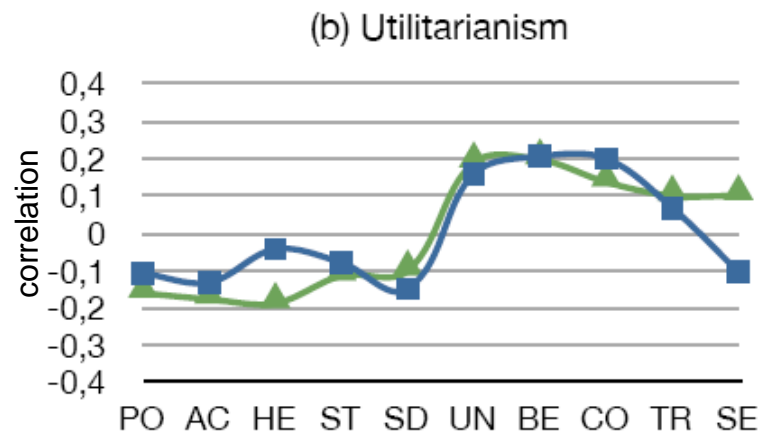
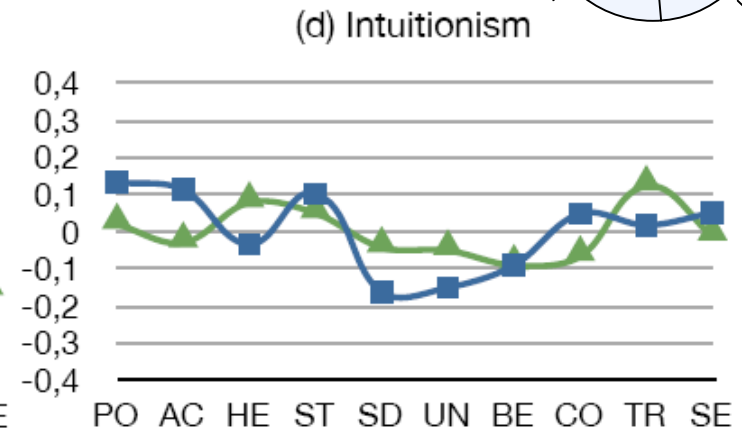
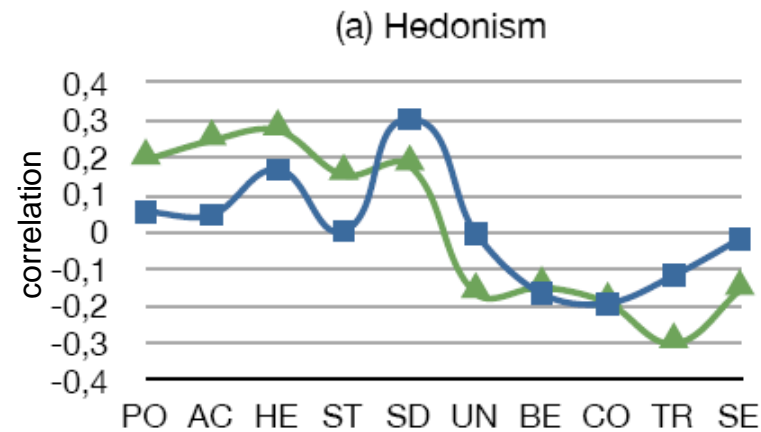


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BRA GER

PO: Power; AC: Achievement; HE: Hedonism; ST: Stimulation; SD: Self-Direction;
 UN: Universalism; BE: Benevolence TR: Tradition; CO: Conformity; SE: Security;
 all $|r| > .15$ (BRA) or $|r| > .19$ (GER) are significant on a 1% level.

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Ethical Positions (Q) and Values

Background



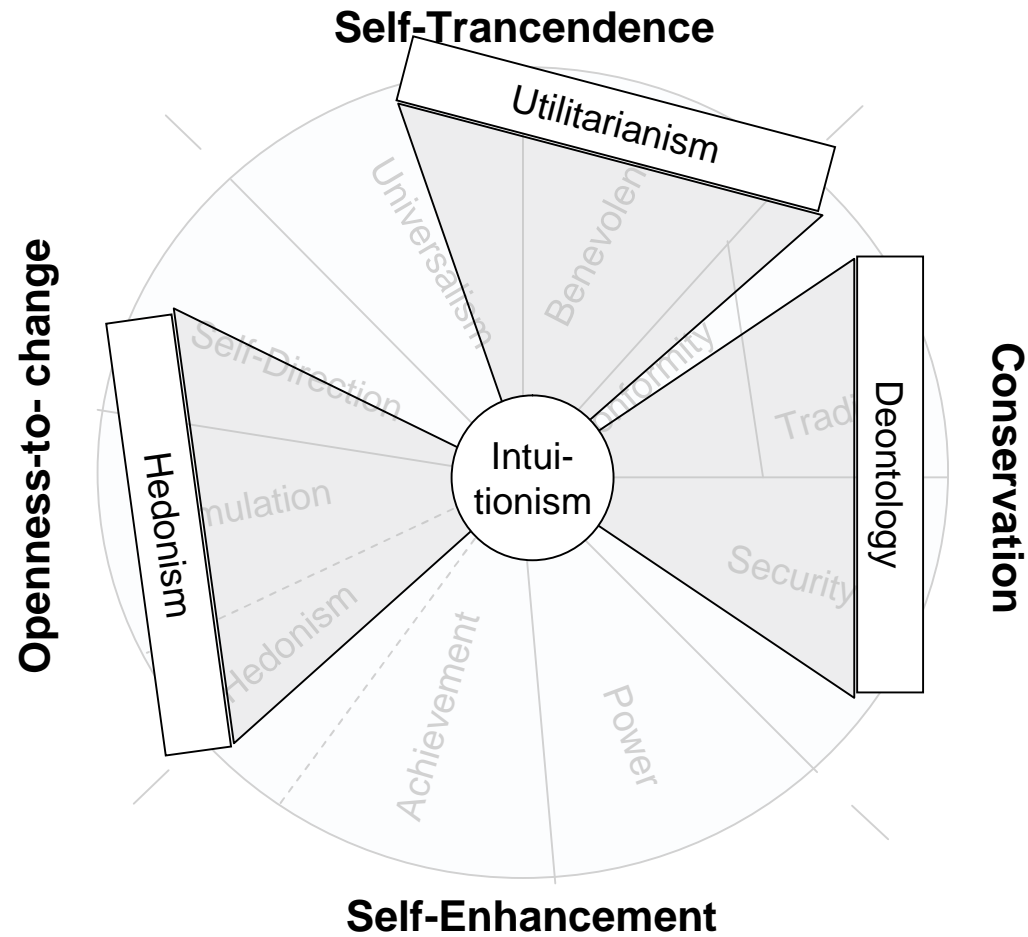
Method



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Conclusions

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Results



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- § Freeform and questionnaire formats tap different aspects of ethical content in justifications:
 - FF formats are production tasks and require the respondent to generate ethical reasoning. They reveal ethical positions that are evoked by the situation
 - Q formats are recognition tasks and provoke answers according to a general social norm. They reveal ethical positions that are cross-situational and, thus, trait-like

- § There are intercultural differences in the ethical content used. The differences are moderated by the way of measurement
 - In comparison to Germans, Brazilians prefer ethics with a general focus (Utilitarianism, Deontology; as revealed by Q format) and means-oriented ethics (intuitionism, deontology; as revealed by FF)

- § There are low but highly systematic relations between personal values and the ethical content of justifications (as measured by Q format)

Thank you for
your attention



References:

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- Witte, E. H., & Doll, J. (1995). Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung: Zur Rechtfertigung von Handlungen [Social cognition and empirical research on ethics: On justification of behaviour]. In E.H. Witte (Ed.), *Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung* (pp. 97-115). Lengerich, Germany: Pabst.

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BACKUP: Intercultural differences (Questionnaire)

Conceptual analysis of „ethical justification“

Outline of prescriptive attribution

Determinants of prescriptive attributions

	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 4	Dilemma 5	Dilemma 6	mean (sd)	d
Hedonism								
Germany	-0.33	1.26	1.25	0.51	0.13	0.72	0.67 (0.55)	0.33
Brazil	-0.71	1.09	1.08	0.69	0.09	0.56	0.48 (0.61)	
<i>p</i>	.001	.053	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	<.01	
Intuitionism								
Germany	-0.36	-0.32	-0.36	-0.56	-0.70	-0.25	-0.43 (0.53)	0.32
Brazil	-0.56	-0.58	-0.62	-0.68	-0.70	-0.55	-0.61 (0.59)	
<i>p</i>	<.05	<.01	<.01	n.s.	n.s.	.001	<.01	
Utilitarianism								
Germany	-0.08	-0.52	-0.46	0.01	0.21	-0.27	-0.20 (0.44)	0.23
Brazil	0.40	-0.54	-0.53	-0.07	0.32	-0.07	-0.09 (0.51)	
<i>p</i>	<.001	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	<.05	<.05	
Deontology								
Germany	0.77	-0.42	-0.44	0.03	0.36	-0.20	-0.04 (0.38)	0.60
Brazil	0.86	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.30	.06	0.22 (0.48)	
<i>p</i>	n.s.	<.001	<.001	n.s.	n.s.	<.01	<.001	

Notes. Centered data used. Degrees of freedom: Dilemmas 2 - 5: 463, dilemma 1 and 6: 396. Due to differences in the responses between the cultures, in the analysis of dilemma 1 and 6, only participants choosing option A were included.

BRA is higher in Ethics with a general focus



BACKUP: Intercultural differences (Freeform)

Conceptual analysis of „ethical justification“

Outline of prescriptive attribution

Determinants of prescriptive attributions

	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 4	Dilemma 5	Dilemma 6	mean (sd)	d
Hedonism								
Germany	0.04	0.62	0.60	0.25	0.46	0.54	0.42 (0.19)	0.64
Brazil	0.03	0.41	0.37	0.56	0.17	0.31	0.31 (0.15)	
<i>p</i>	n.s.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
Intuitionism								
Germany	0.20	0.10	0.08	0.29	0.13	0.20	0.16 (0.11)	0.95
Brazil	0.18	0.36	0.38	0.13	0.32	0.34	0.29 (0.16)	
<i>p</i>	n.s.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.01	<.001	
Utilitarianism								
Germany	0.52	0.08	0.16	0.19	0.25	0.14	0.20 (0.15)	0.39
Brazil	0.44	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.22	0.03	0.14 (0.12)	
<i>p</i>	n.s.	<.01	<.001	<.001	n.s.	<.001	<.001	
Deontology								
Germany	0.23	0.21	0.17	0.27	0.16	0.12	0.21 (0.15)	0.30
Brazil	0.34	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.29	0.32	0.26 (0.18)	
<i>p</i>	<.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	<.001	<.001	<.01	

Notes. Weighted and centered data. Degrees of freedom: Dilemma 2 - 5: 462, Dilemma 1: 387, Dilemma 6: 385. Due to differences in the responses between the cultures, in the analysis of dilemma 1 and 6, only participants choosing option A were included.

BRA is higher in Ethics with a focus on means

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