

# People sensitive to sexual disgust more likely to be Kantian thinkers

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Every person has both utilitarian (consequentialist) and Kantian (duty- or rule-based) moral intuitions, which are activated in different situations in different ways. The field of moral psychology studies these types of intuitions and the psychological factors behind them. The emotion of disgust has been found to influence the formation of moral judgements. According to a recent study in moral cognition, individuals who are sensitive to sexual disgust are more likely to make duty-based moral judgements. The study has been published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, hosted by Nature Publishing Group.

## Trolley dilemmas divide intuitions

According to postdoctoral researcher Michael Laakasuo, reactions to the classical trolley dilemmas are good examples of how moral intuitions are divided: A runaway trolley is about to drive over five workers on the track. Participants are asked if it's acceptable to divert the trolley to a nearby track that only has one worker. In a situation like this, about 90 percent of people think that such a utilitarian action is acceptable. Only about 15 percent of people believe it is acceptable to push somebody on the tracks to stop the trolley. This moral condemnation of a sacrifice is considered Kantian, after moral philosopher Immanuel Kant, who claimed it is never permissible to use human lives merely as a means to an end.

## The rule-obedient won't treat others as objects

Previous research has split [disgust](#) sensitivity into three different sub-dimensions: pathogenic, sexual and moral disgust. Individuals who are sensitive to pathogen disgust are especially repulsed by things like dog poo or the sight of open wounds. People who easily experience sexual disgust feel aversion toward watching pornographic videos or hearing their neighbours making love. Individuals sensitive to moral disgust will express disgust toward people

who cut in line.

"A bit surprisingly, our results imply that moral disgust sensitivity has no connection with Kantian or utilitarian moral preferences," Laakasuo says.

The results are surprising also in that sexual disgust seems to be strongly associated with moral views against sacrificing [individuals](#) in order to save the lives of several others.

"People who are, for example, not keen on watching porn or do not like to think about giving oral sex are also more likely to find killing individuals for 'the greater good' aversive. We do not know why this is so, but sexual disgust sensitivity is known to be associated with conservative attitudes and rule obedience more generally, so it could be that treating people as objects is also more aversive to those who are conscious about rules and social norms," Laakasuo explains.

**More information:** Michael Laakasuo et al. Individual Differences in Moral Disgust Do Not Predict Utilitarian Judgments, Sexual and Pathogen Disgust Do, *Scientific Reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.1038/srep45526](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep45526)

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