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Postdoctoral Research Proposal
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Intuitions of justice: The ideological and moral components of punitiveness toward crime

Individuals' moral systems and moral preferences are gaining attention from philosophers, cognitive neuroscientists, psychologists and legal scholars (Miller, 2008). From support for biotechnology to the success of social policies, individuals' morality is front and centre in predicting attitudinal outcomes (Bowles, 2008; Gitter, 2001). The proposed post-doctoral research addresses the question of how individuals' moral systems can contribute to support for harsh criminal justice policies, even when the social, fiscal and political costs are so great (Pettit & Western, 2004; Roberts & Hough, 2005; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Understanding the moral underpinnings of punitiveness could help identify criminal justice policy responses that are in line with individuals' moral concerns but that are not detrimental to society. The proposed research draws on Haidt's moral foundations theory which suggests that moral judgment reflects affective responses to five universal moral dimensions: Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority and Purity (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2001). The results of large scale studies suggest that individuals vary in the weight they place on each moral dimension when forming a moral judgment, and that some reliable differences exist between politically liberal and conservative individuals (Haidt, 2008; Haidt & Graham, 2007; van Leeuwen & Park, 2009; Haidt, Graham & Joseph, 2009). The proposed studies will investigate how individuals' moral systems are key predictors of punitiveness, and are associated with political ideology, the endorsement of criminal stereotypes, and with cognitive and affective responses to crime. The findings could help explain why increasingly harsh criminal justice policies resonate with both politically conservative and liberal individuals.

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