

COLLOQUIUM SERIES

TITLE: Motivated Moral Reasoning

Date: September 26, 2008
Location: Somerville House, Room 3345
Time: 3:00-4:00 p.m.

(Please join us after the talk for light refreshments)

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Abstract:

Because moral claims cannot be supported by reference to “facts,” people often defend specific moral positions by invoking general moral principles. Principles (e.g., “one should never sacrifice innocent life even for a greater good”) have the appearance of being foundational rules that can guide judgment across a variety of situations, making specific moral claims (e.g., “terrorism is wrong”) seem less like aesthetic preferences and more like rationally-derived inferences. In this talk, however, I report a number of studies showing that people faced with moral dilemmas shift their reliance on moral principles to rationalize desired conclusions. Because both deontological and consequentialist thought produce plausible rationales for specific moral claims, people often show inconsistent moral reasoning when faced with similar moral scenarios that differ only in their affective implications. The studies described in this talk illustrate this moral inconsistency effect by comparing judgments of political liberals and conservatives, and the implications of motivated reasoning processes for the polarized state of current U.S. political discourse is discussed.

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