Implicit Theories of Moral Character: Effects on Moral Evaluation and Distributive Preferences in Dictator Game

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Previous research documented the effect of beliefs about social order and immutability of moral character on moral evaluation. These beliefs amplify the orientation towards severe moral judgments, with a preference for retribution instead of rehabilitation. In the present study, we aimed to check for interactive effects of these beliefs on punishment and distributive preferences. We investigate whether social cynicism plays a role in this relation, since trust in institutions and people is a factor that may bias people's definition of what is fair and what is not. We found that beliefs about the immutability of moral character accentuate the prosecutor mindset and generate greater attribution of blame.

1. Theoretical background

Studying lay people's reactions to moral transgressions help theorists understand moral reasoning and develop descriptive models of ideal decision-making. It also helps practitioners examine lay intuitions and preferences regarding distributive, procedural and retributive justice. These intuitions and preferences affect the perceived legitimacy and credibility of institutions and have further an impact on norm compliance, voter behavior, and participatory democratic behavior. We assume that there is interdependence between beliefs regarding people's character and cognitions about right and wrong. We believe that it is important to find the ways in which general beliefs regarding crime, criminality, and overall social justice affect individual evaluations of what is right or wrong, as well as the calibration of the level of punishment and reward.

Socio-functionalist models (e.g. Tetlock 2002) describe lay people as acting according to situational goals when deciding what is just and who deserves what. Capitalizing on the good and carrying the weight of bad behaviors are central concerns of religion, politics, education and justice, demanding a balance between the social justice goals of achieving control and order on the one hand, and reaching fair decisions for the accused, on the other. As Skitka and Wisneski (2012) pointed out, the layperson was described in several metaphorical frames: as intuitive economist, intuitive prosecutor, intuitive theologian or politician. However, the two authors emphasize that, in fact, people switch between these roles depending on their situational demands and constraints, on whether they are judging fairness of distributions, rewards and punishments, or on whether they are interested in establishing if people get what they deserve. We go a little further than the two authors and maintain that the alternation between these roles manifests itself neither discretely nor abruptly, but rather as a more dynamic oscillation with interdependent and spillover relationships between the roles. Thus, procedures and standards of the prosecutor or the theologian, who is concerned with protecting sacred values, might influence the outcomes of the intuitive economist. We also believe that the intuitive scientist is omnipresent, and that his explanations and predictions of moral behavior are inherently embedded in retributive and distributive decisions. When predicting other's goals, motivations and actions, some people may adhere to causal and dispositional explanations, while others will put emphasis on situations and will believe people can change (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997; Nisbett 2003). It is obvious that the actual perspective, that is, the emphasis either put on the individual or on the context, can influence the decision to collaborate or defect, or the decision to endorse retributive or rehabilitative measures for an individual who committed a moral transgression. For some more than for others, aspects such as desert and merit might dominate decisions.

We would like to advance the study of moral reasoning by attempting to integrate two sets of beliefs about the moral aspect of individual characters: people's beliefs about when they should advocate retribution, on the one side, and their distributive preferences, on the other. The existing literature is lacking attempts to integrate perceptions of distributive and retribu-

tive justice. Distributive justice is a topic preferred in behavioral economics, while retributive justice makes the object of some psycho-legal studies. However, we find this separation impoverishing to the field of morality research, since the two aspects of justice are organically influencing one another and are consubstantially present in ideological discourses. Transgressing the dichotomy would articulate a more inclusive understanding of intuitive social justice. We believe that allocation of punishment and resources are context-dependent. In other words, beliefs about one's social environment influence both the allocation of resources and punishment.

When people witness transgressions that go unpunished and perceive authorities as inefficient, they tend to express and defend the violated norms. We endorse the view expressed by Fehr and Fishbacher (2003), who argue that people are intuitive durkheimians, for whom punishment of norm violation is an end in itself. People actively invest in identifying and punishing wrongdoers, and even derive pleasure from identifying and justly punishing transgressors (Crockett et al. 2013).

Politicians and media often cultivate discourses that attach evaluative valence to the character of people, groups or nations and talk about a presumable moral decline of society and institutions. They are also bringing forward the notion of social order and general decline when they discuss norm violations. In this context, it is important to verify whether mindset-induced punitiveness affects the objectivity of moral evaluations and if so, whether we can avoid this bias. As Tetlock and colleagues (2007) indicated, there are factors that intensify vigilantism, such as the declining of punishment rates in contexts of rising criminality. Cheater-detection modules are automatic and make the factors that increase severity of evaluations more easily to detect. However, debiasing the evaluations will probably require strategies that are more deliberate. Finding the factors that invest principles and sanctions with moral force is a priority for both theory and practice.

Among the factors that affect crime explanations and the preferred reactions to it, we earlier mentioned the influence of situational and contextual factors in assessing desert, that is, the reasons for reward or punishment. In evolutionary terms, people have specialized cheater-detection modules that answer the need to identify cheaters and free riders. It is important to

identify those predisposed to malevolent actions, since they could compromise social cooperation (Greene 2013). People adopt and cultivate several types of beliefs regarding the character of individuals and their social environment. These beliefs are crucial for evaluative processes. When they explain social deviance, some cultures and individuals put emphasis on the transgressors' characters, while other simply blame the situation and the broader context (Choi, Nisbett, and Norenzayan 1999; Singh et al. 2012). As Harman (1999) put it, Western folk moral psychology is a character trait-based one. Understanding how people conceive (moral character) traits is central for understanding the role of lay normativity.

However, it is important to see whether people think in terms of traits or whether they focus on situations when they analyze cases of punishment or reward. It is also important to understand how they conceive those traits. The latter are mainly beliefs about human psychological characteristics. There are two main clusters of theories in this area. On the one hand, entity theories (ET) endorse the view that moral behavior relies on stable, unchangeable traits or essentialist properties of individuals (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995). Their counterparts are incremental theories (IT), which postulate that moral conduct is flexible and dynamic (Gervey et al. 1999). These beliefs hold intercultural, interindividual and intraindividual variability, and they are cultural and socially shared cognitions expressed in proverbial wisdom, such as: "A leopard cannot change its spots," "Once a cheater, always a cheater." Other proverbs address incrementalism in the form of both positive ("It's never too late to turn over a new leaf") and negative change ("Your character can be corrupted by bad company"). Various studies converged to the conclusion that entity theorists evaluate transgressions more harshly and allocate more punitive measures. In contrast, incremental theorists, who are mainly motivated by restorative philosophies, are rather endorsing corrective measures, education, healing, and rehabilitation (Gervey et al. 1999). However, it is important to differentiate between how entity theorists and incremental theorists hold people accountable. Priming implicit theories infuse people's judgments about fairness with a focus on different strategies of uncertainty management. Some people might choose prudent, conservative allocation strategies, like self-interested distribution of

resources, lower tolerance toward free-riding, severe punishment for norm transgressions, and meritocratic arrangements, as meritocracy motivates hard work and risk taking. Others may find these strategies unjust.

The socio-functionalist model has advanced an explanation for retributive and consequentialist hyper-vigilant responses to norm transgressions (Tetlock 2002). This model states that, when experiencing repeated norm violation that goes unpunished, either as two- or third-party, people are prone to entering a "prosecutorial mindset," an evaluative syndrome that is fueled by anger and motivated by social justice. This mindset shows a higher sensitivity to social and legal norm violating behavior. One can read it as a type of implementation mindset (Gollwitzer 1999; Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999) or as a goal state generated by the lack of justice or social order. This state is motivated by the desire to restore the order. Similar to the implementation mindset, the prosecutorial mindset deactivates itself when the goal of justice is achieved (Tetlock, Self, and Singh 2010). Prosecutorial mindsets can be forward-looking (when focused on future crime deterrence) and backward-looking (when focused on retribution, that is, on making the harm doer pay proportionately to the harm inflicted). The goal of this mindset is to ensure group norm compliance, obedience, and shared responsibility. It aims at specific deterrence of individual criminal behavior by discouraging counter-normative behavior. The side effect of this effort to bolster prosecution is a harsher punishment. Subjects are good in finding justifications of punishment but they show a significant lack of consideration for exculpatory evidence. This zero tolerance stance increases the risk of type I errors, which leads to greater acceptance towards convicting the innocent. When justice is served and social order restored, the anger and the desire to punish are expected to decrease (people adjust these biases), just as the above-mentioned incremental mindset would predict. The prosecutorial frame may become chronic under persistent social threat, as the relationship between criminality rates, unemployment, and authoritarianism shows (Onraet, Dhont, and Van Hiel 2014). Expecting high deception rates, people believe that they can prevent future victimization and exploitation through higher vigilantism and more strict and punitive policing.

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Both research approaches, the prosecutorial mindset theory and the concept of implicit theory of moral character, bring similar epistemic advantages for crime detection. They expose the mechanisms of hypervigilance, an attitude that maximizes detection rate and prediction of transgressions. Hypervigilance is said to serve the social function of avoiding future harm doing by stressing value and norm expression, strengthening evaluative judgments (extremity, importance, certainty), and increasing the degree of perceived negligence or malevolence of the author of norm violations. Similar effects occur on the level of cognitive processing and selective attention: decisions depend on how the focus is shifting towards certain aspects of the case. High priority is placed on the effectiveness of punishment, which might cause lesser objectivity in case evaluation. The result also includes a higher tolerance of vigilantism and the tendency to protect the innocent. In this case, minimizing type I errors is not a priority.

As they represent context-sensitive, malleable devices used to explain and predict the social world, both approaches are able to uncover relevant sources of systematic bias in scaling punishment. However, when crime severity is at highest level, the effects of implicit theories and prosecutorial mindsets should be obscured. Both approaches also succeed in explaining how conservative preferences are generated in terms of hierarchies of foundations and principles, such as equity *vs* equality, and/or need. They could be successful in predicting arrangements of retributive justice (assigning punishment, processing of case-related information) and distributive justice (preference for egalitarian or meritocratic, competitive distributions in economic games and other distributional choices in hypothetical societies). It might be the case that both prosecutorial mindsets and implicit moral character theories have the same distal utility of enhancing survival and functioning of groups. They help detect free riders and malevolent wrongdoers, thus promoting social norms and increasing group cooperation. Punitiveness is justified as a detection mechanism that enhances the probability of identifying the person who bears responsibility for wrongdoing. It has a role in systemic explanation (rising social disorder, general moral decline and corruptibility, low accountability for the criminal justice), where the focus is deterrence/expressive norm enforcement.

Here we mention some of the differences between the two types of mindsets. Implicit theories are relatively stable and general sets of beliefs about people in the social world, that function as dispositional but not rigid anchors. These beliefs depend on societal values and norms and can be influenced by temporarily or chronically inducing a specific type of explanation or the alternative viewpoint. Prosecutorial beliefs, on the other hand, are specific beliefs about social contexts in which people live. They are temporary, activated by contextual triggers, and can become dispositional (Tetlock et al. 2007). Their goal is a remedial and palliative one. They aim to preserve the social order and give birth to a type of vigilantism, which seems to be more pervasive and operates in a broader and indiscriminate way, until social order is restored (Tetlock, Self, and Singh 2010). In the case of implicit theories, punitiveness is justified by formulating individual (internal, stable) causal explanations for transgressions. In this case, the focus is on incapacitation. They can also serve value-expressive goals to a higher degree than the prosecutorial mindset and may protect the person's self-worth. Their ego-protective function serves against the unpredictability of a rapidly changing world, which is not the case for prosecutorial mindset that mainly has group-protective functions.

2. The present study

Our broader research goal is to unify and examine the nomological networks of constructs described above and, at the same time, to emphasize the inflation of models that aim to explain the similar phenomena. We experimentally manipulated immutability beliefs and prosecutorial mindsets in search for additive and/or interactive effects. We expect that priming the prosecutorial mindset will influence the allocation decision in the Dictator Game, the support for meritocracy, and the attitude towards egalitarianism. We also predict that implicit theories will moderate these effects.

As explained in the introductory section, we expect that implicit theories and prosecutor mindsets will affect the way in which people perceive morally charged social incidents, such as crime. In addition, we explore their beliefs concerning the best ways in which society should function, and the

way it currently works. We measured the degree to which they are disillusioned, distrustful, and share the belief that people and institutions are corrupt. In a previous study (Hojbotă 2015), we found that implicit theories correlate with trust. We expect that the prosecutorial mindset prime will influence the allocation decision in the Dictator Game. Induced vigilantism and an immutable view of human character will limit prosocial giving. We also expect that people's social cynicism will affect their endorsement of meritocracy and egalitarianism. Implicit theories about moral character will probably moderate these relations. More specifically, immutability beliefs will accentuate the prosecutorial mindset and thus influence social cynicism and evaluative judgments of criminal actions.

Method

The experiment is based on a 2 (implicit theories of moral character: immutable *vs* malleable) × 2 (prosecutorial mindset: activated *vs* deactivated) between-subjects factorial design. Participants read two vignettes. The first vignette describes the nature of moral character as either immutable or malleable. The second vignette describes a situation where the social order was either threatened (activated prosecutor mindset condition) or not (deactivated prosecutor mindset). After reading the vignettes, participants responded to questions about the wrongness and severity of a crime, internal attribution, intentionality, and harshness of proposed punishment. Other questions aimed at measuring the preference towards prosocial or egocentric allocation in a Dictator Game, and preferences for meritocracy and egalitarianism. A last set of questions measured the degree of the subjects' social cynicism.

Participants

Ninety-five students from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University participated in this study, in expense for course credit. The majority were in the final year of their Bachelor degree in Sociology or Communication and Public Relations. Twenty-six were men and sixty-eight were women, with a mean age of 21.52 (SD=1,71).

Procedure and materials

The experiment took place in large group sessions. The participants first completed a short consent form, followed by a set of socio-demographic questions. Then, they read the two vignettes introduced as part of a study about personal views on moral character and justice. Participants were ensured that responses were anonymous and confidential and that the answers were used for aggregate statistical analyses. They were asked to fill the answers using a focused, impartial and deliberative mindset, as much as they could. After completing the questions, participants were debriefed and offered the occasion to ask questions regarding the purpose of the study. Participants took part in the study voluntarily, and received course credit for their contribution. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (immutability of character & activated prosecutor mindset; immutability of character & deactivated prosecutor mindset; malleability of character & activated prosecutor mindset; malleability of character & deactivated prosecutor mindset). The two independent variables are the two manipulations described below.

Implicit theory of character prime. The two vignettes were adapted from the ones used by Chiu, Hong, and Dweck (1997). They induces a certain implicit theory of moral character by presenting the result of a fictional study conducted by prestigious researchers that finally brought clear conclusions about people's moral character. The immutability vignette revealed that individuals change to a very low degree (comparing character with a strong material), while the vignette supporting the incremental view suggested that people's moral character can experience large variations during the lifespan.

Prosecutorial mindset prime. We manipulated mindsets by using a set of scenarios inspired by Tetlock et al. (2007). One of them, corresponding to the prosecutorial activation condition, presented a community plagued by criminal behavior where those accountable for restoring order are incapable of doing their jobs. In the deactivating condition, participants were induced a rather low prosecutorial mindset using a scenario describing a community where criminality rates were under control, the authorities succeeded to keep them at historically low levels (high conviction rates), and the citizens shown high conformity with the law.

Measures

Moral transgression evaluation. In order to maintain the coherence of the materials, we first applied the task of evaluating a crime, describing its details in a short story that followed the two types of primes. The situation describes a young man entering the house of an elderly victim, legitimizing himself as a police officer and extracting a sum of money from his victim's apartment. The old man is left bond to a chair and discovered a few days later by a relative in deplorable physical and psychological condition. The scenario clearly indicated the intentionality of the harm (the human agent is causing foreseeable economic and physical harm). Respondents were asked to evaluate on a six-step Likert scale the degree to which they perceive the crime as wrong, the degree to which they found the author culpable. They made an evaluation reflecting the internal attribution of the act and the harshness of punishment that should be allocated. Two further general questions measured on 7-step Likert scales the subjects' views on criminal punishment, with a focus on retributive and rehabilitative practices.

Dictator's game. We used the one-trial Dictator Game to measure the preferences of individuals for altruistic (egalitarian) or egoistic distributions of resources when given the opportunity to divide a fixed monetary amount with a presumed fellow participant. Each participant received a fix amount of money (65 RON, about $16) and was instructed that he could divide that amount as he pleased with another (anonymous) participant in the study. The "Dictator" was informed that he could share any amount he pleased, as the other player is bound to accept his resolution.

Perceived support for meritocracy versus egalitarianism was measured with an 8-item scale, with four item addressing each of the two dimensions adapted from Rasinski (1987). Egalitarianism items (e.g. "People who earn larger incomes should pay higher taxes than people with smaller incomes.") reflected ideological beliefs about the primacy of needs and equality in redistributive issues (for instance, advocating progressive taxing). On the other hand, meritocracy items reflected a view of society in which desert and individual achievement should be the basis of people's shares and resources allocation (e.g. "Scholarships should be based more on merit than on need."). The response scales were arranged from 1 to 7, where 1 means "not at all" and

7 the opposite. The descriptive statistics indicated that our respondents were inclined more towards endorsing meritocratic views than egalitarian. The two scales did not significantly correlated.

Social cynicism. The next step was to measure the degree of trust that people display after their beliefs were primed for the two central variables. We employed the subscale from the Social Axioms Survey (Leung et al., 2002) designed to measure the degree to which participants endorse a negative view of human nature, in which people and institutions are corruptible and likely to ignore ethical principles in their conduct. Like implicit theories, social axioms are acquired through social experience (hence their name) and help individuals to map the social world by attaching various kinds of explanations to the perceived characteristics of different individuals, groups, institutions, and social phenomena.

Results

Age and gender did not significantly relate to any variable. We will not mention these variables in the next sections. The manipulation checks for implicit theories prime did not achieve satisfactory internal consistency in the case of immutability beliefs items. The response scale had a reverse pattern of answering compared with the previous sets of questions (with 1 meaning "totally agree" and 6 "totally disagree"), a fact which might account for this result. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables measured in this study.

A Univariate Analysis of Variance indicated an interaction between the two independent variables on culpability of the criminal behavior: $F_{(1,94)} = 4.902$, $p = 0.034$, $\eta p^2 = 0.052$, but not for personal controllability of crime, internal attribution of behavior or retributive recommendations. Figure 1 displays the differences in the levels of perceived culpability of the transgression. The prosecutor mindset manipulation had a significant effect on rehabilitation proposals ($F_{(1,94)} = 5.783$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta p^2 = 0.05$), with the scores in the deactivated prosecutor mindset condition significantly higher (M = 6.53; SD = 0.58) than in the activated condition (M = 6.01; SD = 1.31). This difference was higher in the case of incremental theorists.
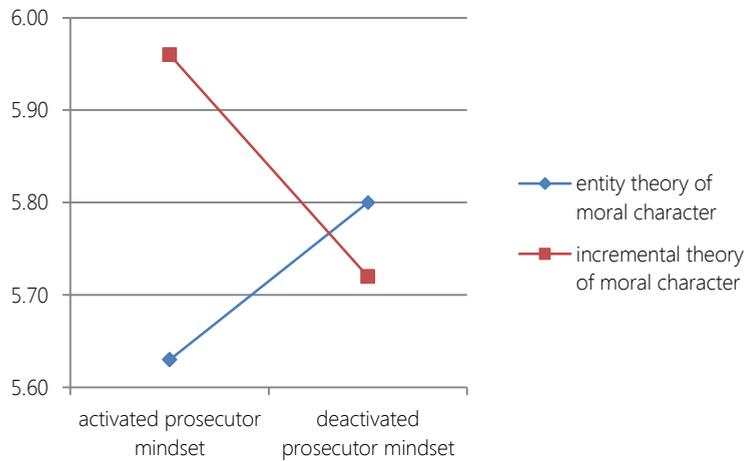
Figure 1 – Interactive effects of prosecutorial mindset and implicit theories on culpability.

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics by condition for the variables measured in the study. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

		N		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ET	activated prosecutor mindset	23	M	5.63	5.05	4.54	4.91	6.23	3.38	4	4.58	4.47	28.8
			SD	.64	.64	1.29	1.48	1.49	.40	1.03	.77	1.01	8.11
	deactivated prosecutor mindset	21	M	5.8	4.95	4.33	5.59	6.45	3.47	3.97	4.5	3.59	31.02
			SD	.33	.82	1.44	1.13	.68	.55	1.27	.98	1.38	5.24
IT	activated prosecutor mindset	25	M	5.96	5.01	4.90	5.22	5.80	3.09	4.06	4.4	3.9	30.78
			SD	.20	.71	1.16	1.52	1.09	.54	1.07	1.02	1.12	7.20
	deactivated prosecutor mindset	25	M	5.72	5.10	4.68	5.32	6.6	3.35	4.08	4.56	3.84	28.26
			SD	.52	.64	.95	1.51	.47	.39	1.16	.794	1.02	6.41

Note: 1 – culpability, 2 - controllability of crime, 3- internal attribution of crime, 4 - general retribution, 5 - general rehabilitation, 6 - social cynicism, 7 – egalitarianism, 8 – meritocracy, 9 – social dominance, 10 – Dictator Game score. ET = entity theory, IT = incremental theory.

Manipulation of implicit theories of moral character had a significant effect on social cynicism ($F_{(1,94)}$ = 4.361, p = 0.031, ηp^2= 0.046). Subjects displayed higher level of cynicism in the entity theory condition (M = 3.42; SD = 0.47) than in the incremental theory condition (M = 3.22; SD = 0.48), as shown in Figure 2. To analyze the differences inside each group, we compared the entity theories and incremental theories subjects first from the activated prosecutor mindset, then from the deactivated prosecutor mindset. The results indicated a significant difference between the subjects in the activated prosecutor mindset, with the entity theorists having significantly higher scores on the social cynicism scale (M = 3.38) than the subjects in the incremental condition (M = 3.09), $t_{(44)}$ = 2.059, p = 0.045, d = 0.61. The entity and incremental theorists did not differ significantly on their social cynicism in the deactivated prosecutor mindset, $t_{(44)}$ = 0.898, p = 0.374.

There are no significant overall effects regarding egalitarianism (redistribution of resources) and meritocracy. The effect of manipulation was only marginal in the case of meritocracy. However, as Figure 3 indicates, there might be differences between the two implicit theories groups regarding responses at the social dominance scale, namely between those endorsing an entity theory in the activated prosecutor mindset condition and the entity theorists in the deactivated condition. At a close inspection, we found marginally significant differences between the two groups ($t_{(43)}$ = 1.89, p = 0.062), subjects in the activated prosecutor mindset condition having higher scores on social dominance (M = 4.18; SD = 1.103) than those in the deactivated prosecutorial mindset condition (M = 3.72; SD = 1.19). We found a significant difference between the scores of the entity theorists in the activated prosecutor mindset condition (M = 4.47; SD = 1.01) and the entity theorists in the deactivated prosecutor mindset condition (M = 3.59; SD = 1.38): $t_{(42)}$ = 2.427, p = 0.02, d = 0.72. As Figure 3 shows, there is no statistically significant difference between the subjects in the activated prosecutor mindset (M = 3.90; SD = 1.12) and those primed with the stimulus for deactivating the prosecutor mindset (M = 3.84; SD = 1.02) in the incremental theory condition ($t_{(48)}$ = 0.97, p= 0.845).

Given the patterns of scores obtained when inspecting the relationship between entity theories and social cynicism and meritocratic preference,
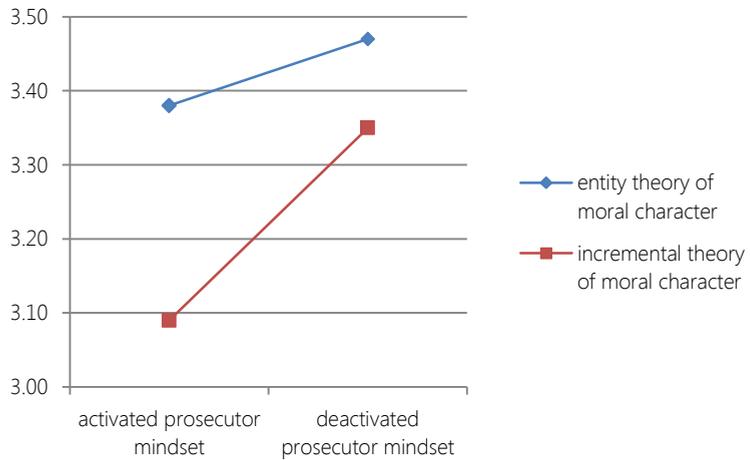
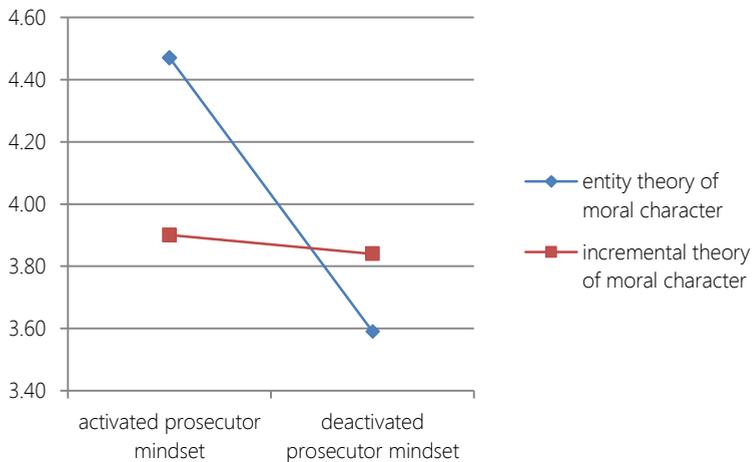Figure 2 – Interactive effects of prosecutorial mindset and implicit theories on social cynicism.

Figure 3 – Interactive effects of prosecutorial mindset and implicit theories on social dominance.

we verified whether the activation of the prosecutor mindset moderates the relationship between social cynicism and dominance. Results indicate that social cynicism predicts dominance only in the deactivated prosecutor mindset ($t(45) = 2.19$, $p = 0.030$).

In order to analyze the allocation amounts in the Dictator Game (DG), we dichotomized the subjects into low (<32.5) and high givers (32.5), taking the modal response (which is also the egalitarian allocation) as cutoff point for the division. 50% of the responders were low givers, while the rest of the respondents chosen egalitarian and prosocial allocations (greater than the half of the sum). To explore the effects of the two independent variables on the prosocial monetary allocations, we used the Chi square test. Results reveal that there was a significant association between the induction of the prosecutor mindset and the type of allocation in the DG ($Chi^2(1,94) = 6.13$, $p = 0.013$). Interestingly, in the deactivated prosecutor condition, subjects made the more selfish allocations. The opposed pattern emerged in the activated prosecutor mindset condition (see Figure 4). The association between the type of allocation and implicit theories was not statistically significant.

We identified a significant difference between the subjects in the activated *vs* deactivated prosecutorial mindset only in the case of those primed with the malleability theory. In other words, implicit theories moderate the effect of induced vigilantism on allocation preferences in the Dictator Game. More specifically, people make significantly more pro-self-choices when they are induced the belief that character is incremental and the social order is in satisfactory parameters.
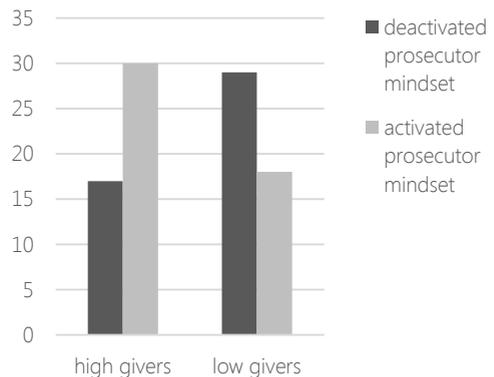

Figure 4 – Distribution of allocation responses in the Dictator Game in the two conditions of the prosecutor mindset.

3. Discussion

Our results indicate that exposing people to certain theories regarding moral characters and the social order affects their level of cynicism and their prosocial tendency. First, we provided evidence that, combining views about the moral character of individuals and of the social context, people's reactions to moral transgressions can be shifted. People judged the culpability of the wrongdoing at the highest level when they are led to believe that character traits do not change and that society's order is on decline. The responses to crime oriented towards retribution and incapacitation are not differing significantly, contrary to what we expected. Implicit theories should enhance the retributive response, with a utilitarian push in the prosecutorial mindset condition. Neither implicit theories, nor the prosecutorial mindset made the responders punish excessively the wrongdoer, but rather oriented their perceptions regarding the severity of the crime. It seems that the disposition towards rehabilitation of wrongdoers is low in the condition of perceived decline of the social order.

Social cynicism is another variable affected by the interactive effects of implicit theories and prosecutor mindsets. Social cynicism reflects a view of the social world as malevolent, with power-driven evaluation of actions that take place in the social environment (Leung et al. 2002). Social cynicism correlates positively with vertical individualism and negatively with agreeableness (Chen et al. 2006). Our result is also reflected by the moderation effect of implicit theories in the relation between the prosecutor mindset and dominance beliefs. Priming for entity theory accentuated the effect of vigilantism on the preference for hierarchy-justifying beliefs, such as the necessity of allocating power and influence in society to those who stand out from the crowd in terms of their capacities and achievements. However, we found no effects for the subscales measuring redistribution of resources or allocating material rewards based on personal merit. Power-based hierarchies are thus preferred when social order is threatened and people are seen as fixed entities.

These patterns of results may be due to the fact that, given certain combinations of character and society narratives, people endorse different

concepts of justice. In resources distribution, combining a view that people are not changeable and society is working deficiently with the view that authorities are doing their jobs, may lead to a preference for competitive, meritocratic arrangements. On the other hand, the perception of a healthy social order along with the belief that human nature can change might make people more conservative about the given resources and act less altruistically.

Inducing people to believe that societies are threatened by uncontrollable levels of crime and that it is hard to change criminal tendencies (just as the prosocial ones) affects the disposition of individuals to protect their wellbeing, lives, properties, and the overall social order. It is very important to study citizen's intuitions about the moral treatment of crimes, especially in social contexts where criminal justice already suffers a loss of credibility. When court decisions are highly divergent from what the community considers as just, people might think that the social order is declining, as authorities fail to do their jobs properly and cannot discourage potential criminals to engage in transgressions.

The associations between implicit beliefs and prosecutor mindsets can take several alternative forms, with independent or additive, uni- or bidirectional effects, influenced by the way people evaluate the morality of individuals and groups. One can expect that implicit theories and prosecutor mindsets will have mutually enhancing effects on punitiveness and other evaluative decisions, such as forgiveness, acceptance of reparative acts, willingness to engage in prosocial acts, etc. A context in which the dominant perception is that people do not change and that the moral order is deteriorating will give rise to conservative attitudes towards resources and will foster justifying beliefs for these attitudes, such as social mistrust, cynicism, and hostile attribution. This constellation of reactions will further fuel essentialist, dispositional explanations for social dysfunctions (blame-based explanations of negative outcomes). A mindset influenced by an entity theory will strongly activate the intuitive prosecutor syndrome. Incremental views could have a complementary and/or compensatory role along with prosecutorial mindsets in explaining evaluative judgments, as well as micro- and macro-distributive preferences. For instance, a positive perception about the actual social situation and the belief that people have the capacity to change might

lead individuals to be more open for a competitive and productivity-based frame, and prioritize equity against need and equality.

The data presented in this study did not support the hypothesis that a prosecutorial frame of thinking of the social environment combined with the entity theory about moral character will reduce altruistic giving. We hypothesized this relation based on the assumption that, when people enter a rigid and vigilant mindset, they will show less trust. Consequently, the concern for fair distributions should be less prominent, as they expect others to cooperate only to a limited extent. Our data point rather to the alternative pattern of association between the main variables. A possible explanation could be that entering a prosecutor mindset might activate a concern for restoring social order and harmony. Social cohesion can be achieved through not only greater vigilance and enhanced authority, but also by focusing on the others' basic needs. When stability and order in the social environment are secured, more competitive, individualistic frames of thinking and acting might motivate individuals.

Our results are at odds with the initial expectations regarding distributive preferences. However, they had the hypothesized effect regarding the evaluation of the criminal behavior. An interesting observation is that immutability beliefs influence social cynicism more than the description of a worsening social order. The results indicate that the two types of mindsets work on different levels: implicit theories lead to expectations regarding the changeability of people's intentions and deeds, while the prosecutor mindset refers to the efficiency of the authorities responsible for detaining and justly punish transgressors.

Future studies should explore whether the participants chronic political orientations and social values affect the patterns of result found in this study. Introducing conditions with counterbalanced order of the vignettes would reduce the suspicion that the order of the presented stimuli has an effect on the result pattern. Supplementing the data with a control condition in which the prosecutor mindset is neither activated nor deactivated should enable stronger conclusions surrounding the results. It is possible that the discourse on the virtues of the justice system and its efficiency will activate specific reactions concerning moral evaluation and will trigger a different

behavior compared with a discourse of moral decline. This new factor could have an independent effect on moral evaluative judgments. The discourse of moral decline and growing crime rate is usually identified with the conservative rhetoric in several political issues (Eibach and Libby 2009), clearly affecting the priority and valence associated to different types of moral values.

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