



Reply to Quillien: Intuitive preferences and interpretive humility in intentionality judgments

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We appreciate Quillien's (1) interest in our recent article (2), and we thank him for writing a commentary that expands on a point we made in our paper: Intentionality judgments in Knobe-style paradigms can be multiply determined and should not be uncritically interpreted as straightforward reflections of moral preferences. In a pithy summary of his core argument, Quillien (1) writes, "[M]any factors besides moral valence or preferences influence people's judgments." This precisely echoes our manuscript (2): "[T]he Knobe effect task is a bit of an odd one, potentially amenable to multiple explanations."

In our original manuscript and in this reply, we wholeheartedly agree with Quillien that many factors *can* lead to Knobe-like effects. Indeed, in our manuscript, we already explicitly considered the Nazi example (3) that Quillien cites as one of two interpretational exceptions within the literature—that intentionality asymmetries may be driven not by evaluative preferences, but by perceived norm violations:

[P]articipants might attribute more intentionality to actions leading to atheism not because they intuitively favor religious belief, but because they perceive such actions as violating societal norms favoring religious belief. We believe that while this alternative explanation is worth considering, the robustness of the Knobe effect we observed across diverse cultural contexts—even in highly nonreligious societies, where proreligious norms are presumably weak—supports our original interpretation that individual preferences play a significant role (2).

We further noted that our findings are "consistent with the possibility that even atheists in nonreligious societies intuitively disfavor atheism, relative to belief—as well as with other possible explanations." Far from overinterpreting the Knobe effect as exclusively morally valenced, we explicitly encouraged a cautious, multifactorial reading—exactly in line with Quillien's commentary.

Importantly, Quillien does not dispute our empirical findings: That intentionality is more readily ascribed to side

effects that produce atheists than to those that produce theists, across diverse societies. Nor does he consider the broader context of our research program, which triangulates this same asymmetry using different cognitive tasks (e.g., representativeness judgments) and independent datasets (4). These converging results strengthen the interpretation that even in secular societies, intuitive associations between atheism and negativity persist. In contrast, it is unclear how the alternative explanations in the papers cited by Quillien would explain or inform either the cross-cultural patterns in our data, or the convergence with related research.

We share Quillien's view that future work should further probe the mechanisms underlying intentionality asymmetries. Indeed, our study contributes to this effort by extending Knobe-style effects into a new sociocultural domain and documenting their cross-cultural robustness. We welcome additional theoretical and empirical work clarifying the roles of norm violation, evaluative preference, and other candidate mechanisms.

In sum, we appreciate Quillien's reiteration of alternative interpretations considered in our manuscript, and we welcome the chance to expand on that theme here. We are grateful for the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to interpretive humility and methodological pluralism in the study of moral cognition.

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