

## **A Quantification of Morality: Preliminary Findings from the Moral Standards Project**

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### **Abstract**

Can morality be quantified in a meaningful way? After a number of false starts, we eventually developed a system of measurement which we believe is not only meaningful, but which can shed new light on both the moral standards of religions and the morals of individuals for decades to come. With feedback from various religious leaders, we first developed a questionnaire for moral leaders that consists primarily of 120 items in which we ask those leaders to rate a wide range of morally arguable human activities (euthanasia, abortion, cloning, etc.) in nine different categories on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (always moral) to 5 (always immoral); if they preferred, they could instead reply “not a moral issue,” “depends on circumstances,” or “not sure.” We reached out to a diverse group of moral leaders to complete the questionnaire and, at this writing, have collected data from 119 such individuals, among them: ministers, priests, rabbis, imams, ethics professors, the dean of a prestigious divinity school, and a Catholic archbishop, representing 28 religious groups in all. These data have allowed us to calculate, among other things: (1) a rank ordering of religious groups according to how restrictive or permissive they are, (2) a breakdown of such rankings by moral category, and (3) a comparison of moral judgments made by moral leaders within a given religion. When we had more than 100 moral leaders in our database, we released a public version of the questionnaire at MyMorals.org, and we have now analyzed data from a diverse group of 998 people who completed it. Among other things, data in our “followers” database have allowed us to calculate: (1) the extent of agreement between the standards we obtained from our moral leaders and the moral beliefs of people who identify with the religions of those leaders, (2) a delineation of such agreement by moral category, and (3) measures of the extent to which moral beliefs vary both within and between religions. As these databases grow in size in coming years, scholars will be able to explore a large number of morality-related issues with increasing rigor.