



Universität Hamburg

# **HAMBURGER FORSCHUNGSBERICHTE**

**AUS DEM ARBEITSBEREICH**

**SOZIALPSYCHOLOGIE**

**-HAFOS-**

**Classical ethical positions and their relevance in justifying  
behavior: A model of prescriptive attribution**

**Erich H. Witte**

**HAFOS 2002 NR. 42**

**Psychologisches Institut I der Universität Hamburg  
Von-Melle-Park 6 20146 Hamburg**

## Classical ethical positions and their relevance in justifying behavior:

### A model of prescriptive attribution<sup>1</sup>

Erich H. Witte

Institute of Social Psychology

University of Hamburg

#### Summary

This paper separates empirical research on ethics from classical research on morality and relates it to other central questions of social psychology and sociology, e.g., values, culture, justice, attribution. In addition, reference is made to some founding studies of ethical research and its historical development. Based on this line of tradition the development of **prescriptive attribution research** is introduced, which concentrates on the justification of actions by weighting the importance of the four classical ethical positions, hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism and deontology, as to why it was "good" or "right" that an action is performed. Six empirical studies are discussed, the first, using a questionnaire based on the four positions reveals marked differences in the justifications given by East and West German workers regarding their work performance. The East Germans tend more towards collectivism, weighting the utilitarian and deontological positions more highly. The second study makes use of a content analytical technique, and concentrates on the difference between the justifications of various professional groups. Economists, doctors and lawyers are asked to justify the introduction of a human germ-cell therapy. Economists are more hedonistic than the other two professional groups, who are more utilitarian and deontological.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Barbara Cox-Tepp for the translation of the original German version of this paper.

The third study, based on a questionnaire, compares East and West German opinion as to whether it is right to remain in a close partnership (marriage) with interpersonal conflicts or whether it is right to dissolve the relationship. In this study, too, the justifications based on utilitarianism and deontology are given precedence by East German subjects, whereas hedonism is more important for West German respondents. After this regional comparison, the fourth study compares the justifications of a more collectivist (ROK) with a more individualistic culture (Germany). Here the differences reveal a greater importance of consequentialism (hedonism, utilitarianism) in the individualistic culture (Germany) and a greater weighting of the rule-directed position (deontology) in the collectivist culture (ROK) . No differences are apparent regarding the intuitionist position.

The fifth and sixth studies use a content analytic approach to investigate the justifications of social behavior found in newspapers and prescriptions in the ethical standards of scientific societies. This resulted in an inverse relation between utilitarian and deontological arguments: 2 vs. 1 in newspapers and 1 vs. 2 in ethical standards.

To summarize, one could say that a deeper understanding of explanations leads towards the classical descriptive attribution theories, whilst a deeper understanding of the energizing forces behind an action lead towards the concept of empirical prescriptive attribution research as proposed here.

Dr. Erich H. Witte, Prof. for Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Hamburg, Institute of Social Psychology, Von-Melle-Park 6, 20145 Hamburg, e-mail: [witte\\_e\\_h@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:witte_e_h@uni-hamburg.de)

Keywords: attribution, justification, culture, ethics, individualism

## **Classical ethical positions and their relevance in justifying behavior:**

### **A model of prescriptive attribution**

**Erich H. Witte**

**Institute of Social Psychology**

**University of Hamburg**

#### **1. Introduction**

In the field of psychology empirical research into ethics and moral judgement was for a longtime confined to issues of developmental psychology in the tradition of Piaget and Kohlberg (Kurtines, Azmitia & Jewirtz, 1992). To a certain extent these issues took on a new note when, for example, studies in line with the concepts of Kohlberg (Löhr, 1998) were conducted with students of economics (as a special group) or with groups from various cultural backgrounds (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), thereby moving away from the realm of developmental psychology in its traditional form. Nonetheless these studies remained within the framework of Piaget's and Kohlberg's approach to ethics. More recent considerations have dealt with the further development of ethical concepts (Flanagan, 1991; Flanagan & Oksenberg Rorty, 1990), the discussion of their fundamental meaning and applicability to everyday life (for examples, see Blicke, 1998; Witte, 1995). And yet, these complex ethical concepts are rarely investigated empirically (Blasi, 1980; Forsyth, 1980).

The aim of this article is, a) to present a new line of research, b) combine this approach with other well-known approaches, c) present selected research findings from the a working environment and, d) point out the significance of this approach for practical purposes. First, we wish to give a short outline of the approach, to give an insight into the way it took shape. In this way similarities and differences to existing research and theoretical concepts can be drawn making it possible to appraise the practicality of the method under discussion.

From a historical perspective it is clear that in contrast to developmental psychology any existing investigations into ethics (i.e., not morality) in the field of social psychology have rarely been taken up or developed further. It is true that Heider's work (1958) is regarded as a major source for the balance theory, for research into justice and the attribution theories, but the excerpts on "what should be "Oughts" and "Values" have so far met with little interest. In terms of their stimulating quality they are comparable with studies on causality, justice and balance. If, however, one goes even further back to the historical roots one comes across a study that more than a hundred years ago empirically examined processes of moral judgement (Sharp, 1897/98) and which, in connection with points of discussion arising from a series of follow-up experiments conducted by Sharp (1908) and the expositions found in Heider (1958), could serve as a model for future empirical research. These studies point out the influence of norms and culture on ethical opinions and supplement the cognitive developmental levels related to age as found in developmental psychology.

In the field of social psychology the lack of empirical research into moral judgement and ethics stands in direct contrast to intensive empirical research into values (Schwarz, 1992; Seligman, Olson & Zanna, 1996), which does not exist in this form in developmental psychology, but can also be found in the field of sociology (Inglehardt, 1997; Klages & Gensicke, 1999). This research into values leads to universal dimensions that are closely related to classical ethical positions. To name just a simple example, the differentiation between materialism and post-materialism is closely linked with utilitarianism and deontology (see below).

Within the framework of this research into values one also comes across the comparison of different cultures with the significant dimension of differentiation between individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995). This form of differentiation draws attention to the focal point of reference in ethical studies, namely the individual or society. The comparison of different cultures within empirical research into ethics is, however, still in its initial stages, and yet, the topicality of this issue can be clearly seen through the world-wide clashes between different ethnic groups who each manage to morally justify the violence and bloodshed they incur (Huntington, 1996).

Finally, when dealing with research into ethics one also has to consider empirical research into justice and responsibility (e.g., see summaries by Greenberg, 1996; Reichle & Schmitt, 1998, Tyler & Smith, 1998) as well as into pro-social behavior in general (Batson, 1998; Fritzsche, Finkelstein & Penner, 2000; Witte, 1994). There are extensive experimental findings related to these fields, but as yet they have rarely been linked with other ethical studies.

All approaches – stemming from the history of social psychology, research into values in social psychology and sociology, justice, pro-social and responsible behavior – concentrate on the value level and could quite well serve to provide one another with mutual stimulus, but this unfortunately does not occur. A possible point of orientation in this rather unstructured context is to take practical philosophy, which has been dealing with value-related questions for many thousands of years, as a basis from which to develop further studies. This would facilitate working out a core that could develop into a basis for future empirical research on ethics.

The use of such a core of content matter as a starting-point is naturally also essential for empirical findings. In this respect, employing a qualitative stage theory based on the notion that the higher level is morally more valuable, as was introduced by Piaget and Kohlberg in developmental psychology, is not entirely unproblematic. This stage theory uses the following sequence: 1. punishment and obedience oriented morality, 2. naive instrumental hedonism, 3. moral behavior of the "good" child, 4. authority oriented morality, 5. democratic morality, 6. conscience oriented morality, 7. cosmos oriented morality (as yet with little empirical corroboration).

But problems in the field of ethics are not of such a simple nature that they can be universally dealt with on the basis of a stage theory. This now leads to the differentiation between ethics and moral judgment. In the field of values one can regard morality as the content and ethics as the foundation (Steinvorth, 1990). Berkel (1998) has already worked out this difference for the field of organizational psychology, and it cannot be repeated here (see also Sternberg, 2000). A question one does finally arrive at in this context is: how do individuals justify their own value-oriented behavior? This question has a retrospective character which can be

supplemented with a prospective character: how can one justify various alternatives for action and by so doing make recommendations for the future? Both cases revolve around the issue of justifications for past and future actions (recommendations). Thus, we have to briefly consider the term “justification”. In order to connect this term with social psychological research, it should be constructed in a similar way to the term “attribution”, which denotes subjective explanations through stating causes or reasons (Anderson, Krull & Weiner, 1996; Read & Miller 1998). Thus, an attribution is a differentiated statement of the varying relevance of reasons and causes with the aim of explaining an effect. Unlike an explanation on the factual level a justification is based on the value level, so that in an ethical sense one can characterize a justification as a statement about the importance of ethical positions which characterize an action as “good“ or “bad” , “right“ or “wrong” (Witte & Doll, 1995). The other way around, one could naturally also ask, how are actions, that are judged as positive or negative, justified? Here we are confronted with the problem that not all actions can be justified. There are, for example, routine actions, that are value free, e.g., “Why is it right that you got on the bus? In contrast, however, the following action: “Why did you offer your seat to the elderly lady on the bus?”, can be given a justification. In the first case one would have to make complicated additional assumptions to arrive at a sensible answer.

The research program which we developed, and which follows the lines taken by social psychological research, could be described as a prescriptive attribution theory (Gollenia, 1999; Hackel, 1995; Maeng, 1996; Witte, 1995). Inherent in this term is the notion that comparable to an explanation that states causes and reasons one can arrive at a justification by referring to classical ethical positions, which assess an action as “good“ or “bad“. It is not only possible to justify past actions, but also to make recommendations for future actions, just as according to the attribution theory it is possible to induce future actions. Analogously to the terms explanation or prediction, as used in the descriptive attribution theory, the terms justification or recommendation can be introduced to the prescriptive attribution theory (Witte, 1994, p.301ff, Witte & Doll, 1995) :

1. There are actions: A.
2. There are classical ethical positions that can be used for the judgement of an action  $E_i$ .
3. There is the judgement of an action that is based on the relationship between the ethical positions and the action  $R(A; E_i)$
4. There is the differentiation of the judgment according to the importance (I) of the ethical position for the judgment of the action  $I_i [R(A; E_i)]$ .
5. There is the justification (J) of an action as “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”:  
 $J(I_i [R(A, E_i)])$
6. Hence the term prescriptive attribution theory (PRATT) is a quintuple equation  
 $PRATT = \{A; E_i; R(A, E_i); I_i[R(A, E_i)]; J(I_i[R(A, E_i)])\}$ .

By breaking down the term “prescriptive attribution theory (PRATT)” into its individual components one can recognize the specific requirements for this field of research. The first question concerns the actions (A). What types of action does it make sense to differentiate, in order to determine various justifications? Along with the judgement dimension “good” vs. “bad”, the differentiation between: individual, inter-individual and social has proved valuable (Witte & Doll, 1995). During an individual action actor and recipient are identical (I chose my job because I wanted to do something useful). In the case of an inter-individual action actor and recipient are different people, but both can be identified (during a seminar I offered my seat to a disabled student). A social action is characterized by one actor and many, not individually identifiable recipients who are affected by the action (I cheat on my tax declaration).



The second question concerns the ethical positions. How many and which ones can be differentiated? Naturally, this question is not easy to answer, but from the perspective of practical philosophy two important dimensions can be derived, namely the differentiation between means and ends oriented ethics and the line of evaluation drawn between the individual and society in general. These two dimensions provide a system of classification by which these ethical positions can be differentiated. From the point of view of empirical research it now additionally becomes important to find methods of empirically determining these positions. With this in mind, a questionnaire was compiled and a content analytical classification system was constructed (see below).

The third question concerns the relationship between the ethical standpoints and an action. This relationship and its immediate significance for the action is assessed using a rating scale or with a content analytical classification system which determines the number of arguments put forward.

The fourth question which deals with the differentiation of the judgement of an action and the connection to the patterns of justification reveals e.g., that positive individual actions are justified hedonistically and or by intuitionist standpoints, positive inter-individual actions according to intuitionist views and positive social actions based on hedonistic, intuitionist and utilitarian positions, but very rarely on deontological grounds. Negative types of action are given no justification, or if at all, as hedonistic (Witte & Doll, 1995).

The fifth question examines the division of actions that are judged as socially positive and socially negative. Such a division is feasible, whereby there are also neutral actions. Naturally, the judgements are also dependent on social indicators, e.g., sex, age, culture, profession etc.

In view of our previous research our chosen methods have proved successful and have potential for future studies that aim to focus more on the value level and determine a basis for this level.

Perhaps a brief comment should still be made concerning the practical and theoretical insights that can be won when the person and fact related attribution theory is supplemented with a value-related prescriptive attribution theory. Every action or each observed effect is equivocal and has to be interpreted. To do this one can use the factual level, which depending on the interpretation can have a number of consequences, e.g., the self-serving bias, diverging explanations given by observer and actor, the conspicuous effect etc.. The value level is comparable in so far as it is also possible to differentiate patterns of justification for the same action performed by members of different cultures, professions, positions etc. Using the factual level of the descriptive attribution theory which uses the subjective allocation of causes and reasons it is easier to understand the model of thinking (Anderson et al., 1996; Read & Miller, 1998). Using the value level of the prescriptive attribution theory it becomes easier to comprehend the model of motivation which the actor or observer of an action subjectively assumes as a justification or recommendation and considers appropriate (Weiner, 1995). As behavior is often a result of cognitive-affective interactions, both forms of the attribution theory are of comparable significance for social psychology, whereby the prescriptive aspect is still in its initial stages. Through this link with the existing descriptive attribution theory one could stimulate future research on ethics by conducting comparable research on the factual and on the value level. The practical application is arrived at almost automatically by asking the question, which ethical positions were primarily followed when an action was performed, in other words what were the value aims, one wished to fulfill, as this reveals the basis of motivation that induced the action. Naturally there is still a long way to go before the action is actually performed, but it is possible to gain a more accurate interpretation of the energizing processes that are of particular importance for individuals, groups or cultures respectively.

## **Ethical positions**

Before commencing with the empirical studies we should consider the ethical positions more closely. As in the field of practical philosophy the approaches are not very clearly laid out, we have to develop categories which provide a certain structure. Nonetheless, it has to be pointed out that one individual can support several ethical positions at the same time, possibly weighting each position somewhat differently. The first widely-known ethical differentiation is the division of means-oriented and ends-oriented ethics, i.e., positions that primarily focus on the process or positions that lend more weight to the result. A second differentiation factor is the level of observation. The focus here can be on the individual or on society in general. With these 2\*2 differentiation features it is possible to classify the ethical positions: hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism and deontology. With regard to hedonism, the striving for pleasure and conviviality had already been raised to the level of an ethical norm as far back as antiquity. In contrast, intuitionism considers the reason for an action to stem from individual insight or individual feeling regarding it as something self-evident. Utilitarianism is based on the principle of achieving the utmost good for the majority. Finally, deontology is derived from general principles such as the categorical imperative.

Table 1: Differentiation of ethical positions for items on which to base a questionnaire

<b>Content matter</b>	<b>Ends</b> <b>Consequences</b>	<b>Means</b> <b>Rule</b>
<b>Level of judgement</b>		
<b>Personal</b>	<b><u>Hedonism</u></b> (I try to make sure that I'm fine)	<b><u>Intuitionism</u></b> (I am sure this action is appropriate.)
<b>General</b>	<b>Utilitarianism</b> (I believe one has to consider the consequences an action has on everyone.)	<b>Deontology</b> (I believe that general principals serve as a guideline for our actions.)

In this table items have been formulated which were used for a questionnaire. In all, there are 20 items, 5 per ethical position respectively. Each time, subjects were asked how important these aspects were when an action was performed. The answers are given on a rating scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) (Witte & Doll, 1995). This short questionnaire has already proved worthwhile in several experiments with a satisfactory internal consistency 0.65 and 0.92 (Cronbach's alpha). It facilitates detecting differences between various cultures, local regions and professional groups when performing various actions (see below).

In addition to using this four-field-scheme for the compilation of the questionnaire, it was also used for the construction of a content analytical system of classification. According to our findings it provides us with an initial basis for empirical ethics research in accordance with the prescriptive attribution theory.

Our focus now is on the work environment and the usefulness of the prescriptive attribution theory for this context. Here, we refer to the findings of a questionnaire study and the content analytical scheme.

### **Professional behavior and ethical positions**

I would like to go into two dissertations in more detail that present the significance of this approach. First, the study conducted by Hackel (1995), examining differences between East and West German workers and second, the dissertation by Gollenia (1999) about the differences in justification strategies found in various professional groups. The first dissertation makes use of the questionnaire, the second one uses a content analytical categorization system which is adapted to the four-field-scheme presented above. The results of four other studies are also outlined here to provide a broader overview of this field of research.

#### Justification of one's own work performance: a comparison of East and West German workers

In a comprehensive study on differences in the professional socialization of workers in East and West Germany a total of 157 individuals were interviewed in 1992 and 1993, shortly after the reunification of Germany (Hackel, 1995). All subjects worked in the production sector. 70 came from East Germany (OiO), 30 from West Germany (WiW), 30 were West Germans who worked in East Germany (WiO), and 27 were East Germans working in the West (OiW).

All subjects were asked the question: "If you think about your work performance, how significant are the following justifications? Subjects were given a questionnaire with 16 items, i.e., due to the length of the entire questionnaire only 4 items per ethical position were used. Cronbach's alpha-values of the 4 scales range from .71 to .83 and are entirely sufficient for

the comparison of means between the groups . The assessment of each item was made on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Table 2: Comparison of justifications by OiO (N=70) and WiW (N=30)

<b>Scales</b>	<b>WiW</b>	<b>OiO</b>	<b>t-Test sign.</b>	<b>Effect : d</b>
<b>Hedonism</b>	4.09	4.26	.23	----
<b>Intuitionism</b>	3.63	3.55	.66	----
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	3.65	4.04	.04	.49
<b>Deontology</b>	3.41	4.14	.00	.81

Table 3: Comparison of justifications by OiW (N=27) and OiO (N=70)

<b>Scales</b>	<b>OiW</b>	<b>OiO</b>	<b>t-Test sign.</b>	<b>Effect : d</b>
<b>Hedonism</b>	3.57	4.26	.00	1.01
<b>Intuitionism</b>	2.75	3.55	.00	0.81
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	3.35	4.04	.00	0.81
<b>Deontology</b>	3.10	4.14	.00	1.14

Table 4: Comparison of justifications by OiW (N=27) and WiO (N=30)

Scales	OiW	WiO	t-Test sign.	Effect : d
Hedonism	3.57	4.06	.01	.73
Intuitionism	2.75	3.78	.00	1.26
Utilitarianism	3.35	3.63	.25	---
Deontology	3.10	3.24	.60	---

The two samples WiW and WiO reveal no differences.

In the East German sample one typically finds a greater weighting of the two ethical positions utilitarianism and deontology. The effect-size measures  $d$  are average to high. Based on the assumption that shortly after German reunification former social conditions were still in effect, then this result reflects a stronger collective tendency with regard to work performance among the East Germans. It is conceivable that the motive to achieve can be additionally increased through reference to the factory plant and society in general than, for example, by addressing individual merit alone, resulting in a stronger hedonistic justification, which was also found to be relevant but was not different in the two regional groups. One can infer this from the mean value of 4.0, the theoretical point of neutrality of the rating scale being 3.0. However, a comparison of the East Germans who work in the West and those who stayed in the East demonstrates how quickly such patterns of justification change, or how other modes of behavior emerge. Subjects who had experienced social changes no longer saw the significance in any form of justification, perhaps with the exception of hedonism, the means being barely above the point of neutrality of 3.0. Even intuitively they are no longer sure which position they should support, ( $M=2.75$ ). They appear insecure as to the options open to them when justifying their work performance. In comparison with the parallel cultural group in the East they no longer see the significance of any ethical position. (That was the case around 1993). The West German commuters, on the other hand, are no different to the West

Germans who remained in the Federal Republic. This group of commuters places most weight on personal positions, including hedonism, so it appears that the motive to work in the East was chiefly induced on the individual level as opposed to the collective level, namely the aim of improving conditions in the former GDR. It was therefore more an issue of personal incentive and not so much of general values, as could later be observed in a number of instances. The notion of assisting in the rebuilding of the new Federal States was of no added importance for their work performance, as was often reported by the media as the main motivation. The commuters sought their own personal advantage similar to the other West German employees. It seems that voluntary commitment in favor of the community was of lesser importance.

On account of these data found by Hackel (1995) it is possible, even in retrospect, to gain a better understanding of certain developments. The West German commuters' prime concern was with their own personal gains, whilst East Germans tended less towards inter-personal competition and focused more on the community. This explains why certain incentives failed as well as why certain avoidance tendencies to compete were apparent among the East Germans and it also shows the inadequacy of referring to the socialization deficits of a socialist system as the sole explanation. It is possible to recognize which value areas are given more weight, enabling the construction of incentive systems that go beyond remuneration alone. Nonetheless, these types of incentive systems are difficult to integrate into a primarily economic-individualistic culture. To summarize, these examples demonstrate in what manner the value level can influence work motivation. It is necessary to look at this in greater detail to gain an understanding of observed work performance and go on to create appropriate incentive systems. This naturally also applies to individual cases, when it comes to identifying employees who are motivated more by individualist or collective concerns, in other words more by a sense of duty or more by reward. In individual examinations, however, a more differentiated instrument has to be employed which can determine and differentiate individual prescriptive attributions with greater accuracy than the method presented here for the comparison of mean values.

#### Professional identity and patterns of justification

Recent years have seen the emergence of various forms of applied ethics that respectively discuss the problems inherent in specific sectors of society: medicine, economics, technology, politics, law etc. These ethical discussions each focus on various aspects. But what actually happens when representatives of various professional groups have to mutually



arrive at a project decision and the perspectives held by each professional field result in varying ethical stances? How is it possible to find a common denominator? This is an exceptionally difficult question as it has been observed that even within a single discipline it is difficult for a professional group to carry on successful discussions arriving at an acceptable outcome. There is a strong indication that common discussion which integrates the perspectives of different professional groups can only be envisaged with the assistance of targeted moderation.

Gollenia (1999) dealt with this question in greater detail in her dissertation. In this context, the only question we want to focus on is how various professional groups justify their decisions in a simulated ethical commission set up to discuss the introduction of a therapy using human germ-cells. This therapy involves the genetic manipulation of an individual's genetic make-up to prevent the passing on of hereditary diseases.

N=84 subjects participated in this experiment. All subjects were either just about to graduate from university or had completed their studies and were already working in the following three professional fields: economics, medicine, law. As members of a simulated ethical commission these subjects were presented with the question whether they would advocate the introduction of this therapy in Germany. They were to make a decision and then give a justification for their choice.

Here, we are only interested in a small sector of the overall, complex experiment (see Gollenia, 1999). The reasons for justification were classified according to the four ethical positions. Inter-rater reliability was sufficient and it was possible to classify almost all the justifications.

Differences between the three groups are even apparent in the number of arguments that were put forward.

Table 5: Means and standard deviation of the number of justifications per person

Professional group	Economics	Medicine	Law
<b>Means and standard deviations</b>	9.86 (s=3.7)	11.86 (s=4.8)	14.8 (s=4.5)

An analysis of variance followed by a Scheffé-test showed that on average the lawyers produced more justifications. It is possible to eliminate this influence by percentaging the number of contributions and then distributing the justifications over the four ethical positions. One then arrives at the following distribution of percentages.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of justifications for the ethical positions and professional groups

<u>Ethical position</u>	Economics	Medicine	Law
<b>Hedonism</b>	39.2 %	18.0%	18.6%
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	37.6%	54.5%	49.0%
<b>Deontology</b>	15.6%	24.7%	29.2%
<b>Intuitionism</b>	3.7%	2.7%	2.6%

A comparison of the professional groups reveals the following preferences:

1. The economists show a preference for hedonistic justifications in contrast to the doctors and lawyers.
2. Doctors and lawyers show a preference for utilitarian arguments in contrast to the economists.
3. Doctors and lawyers show a preference for deontological positions as compared to the economists.
4. In general intuitionist justifications were rare revealing no differences between the groups.

This distribution shows a strong similarity between members of the medical and legal professions who in turn differ from the economists. A distribution of this kind was only partially expected. The expected distribution was a predominance of hedonism for the economists, utilitarianism in the medical field and deontology for members of the legal profession. The actual preferences are not quite so straightforward but certain unmistakable differences cannot be overlooked. The result can be regarded as an indicator that a discussion involving all three groups would not be easy. It also indicates the kinds of misunderstandings that have to be considered when trying to improve the quality of dialogues between professional groups which could lead to important decisions for our society. The inference that one ethical position is better than another is too simple.

#### **A further comparison of East and West Germany: a questionnaire study**

By conducting a further questionnaire study our aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between East and West Germany (Witte & Doll, 1995). Two interpersonal actions were to be justified: a) dissolving a close partnership (marriage), and b) trying to maintain a close partnership in spite of interpersonal conflicts.

Justifications for both actions were assessed using a questionnaire that was based on the same four ethical positions with four items per scale respectively. These were to be rated in terms of their importance for the given justification. The internal consistency (Crombach's alpha) was as follows:

Hedonism :  $\alpha = 0.77$

Intuitionism	:	$\alpha = 0.61$
Utilitarianism	:	$\alpha = 0.83$
Deontology	:	$\alpha = 0.87$

1300 subjects participated in the experiment, 1045 were from West Germany and 255 came from East Germany. The respondents' age was  $M=33$  years. In all, 78 % were women and 22 % men. Throughout the study 88 % lived with a permanent partner. Participants in the experiment were found through advertising in a women's magazine 1990 /91 (Witte & Doll). Of this large sample the only results that interest us here are those which show at least a small effect ( $d=0.20$  according to Cohen, 1988). According to the t-test significant effects ( $d$ ) between East and West Germany were as follows:

Hedonism	:	$d = 0.60$
Utilitarianism	:	$d = -0.36$
Deontology	:	$d = -0.51$

Here, as in the justification of work performance, it is possible to recognize a similar pattern of justification. East Germans give more weight to collectivist ethics, whilst hedonism is more significant for West Germans. Intuitionism ( $d=0.03$ ) reveals no difference. This may be due to the slight internal consistency. It was, however, evident that different justifications for the same two actions could be linked to each respective region. The result had, however, been expected due to "socialist" socialization in East Germany.

A comparison between a collectivist and an individualistic culture: a questionnaire study

In a questionnaire study aimed at disclosing differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures subjects from South Korea (Seoul) (ROK) and from Germany (Hamburg) were interviewed (Maeng, 1996). The sample comprised 144 individuals from Korea and 118 from Germany. In addition, two groups were differentiated, men and women between 20 and 25 and between 40 and 45, in order to examine potential generation differences. Each cell was composed of around 30 respondents. Questions were based on the following interpersonal actions:

I get up and offer my seat to the elderly lady, b) my child's upbringing takes precedence over my professional career, c) I consider my parents' opinion when choosing a future spouse.

In all, 12 actions were to be justified. The very extensive results can be summarized as follows: Germans are more hedonistic and utilitarian in their justifications whilst the justifications of Koreans are mostly founded on deontological arguments. Again, there was no relevant difference in the case of intuitionism.

In contrast to the comparison between East and West Germany, which primarily addressed the personal as opposed to the general level, the difference here is between ends and means.

A point of interest in this context is that empirically the respondents can be easily classified employing a cluster-analysis analysis) (Ward-procedure) which results in 8 clusters of which 3 clusters present either purely Korean or German individuals whilst the other two clusters are mixed. Differentiation according to sex and age has no significant influence.

The public justification of social actions: a content-analytic study

The issue here, is how we justify social behavior publicly. For this study 37 leading editorial articles of a German daily newspaper the "Hamburger Abendblatt" were investigated. These articles comprised 1,138 sentences, of which 174 (15 %) included justifications. A classification of the justifications according to the four ethical positions, resulted in the following percentages: 5 % hedonism, 22 % intuitionism, 45 % utilitarian and 28 % deontology. Slight differences that arose during the classification process were solved through discussion by a group of 3 experienced raters. If we now focus on social behavior which made up 76 % of all reported actions - regardless of whether they were positively or negatively portrayed - the justifications were chiefly utilitarian (52 %), followed by deontological positions (27 %). The relationship between the number of utilitarian to deontological justifications is approx. 2 : 1.

Prescriptions in "Ethical Standards" of scientific societies: a content-analytic study

Social behavior that can be observed in every-day situations is often presented in magazines. Certain social actions, that can be predicted to occur in the future, were set down in "Ethical Standards" (Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1995). Such "Ethical Standards" stemming from the "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (SOZ)" (the German Society for Sociology), the "Berufsverband Deutscher Psychologen (BDP)" (the Association of German psychologists) and the American Psychological Association (APA) in the 1977 edition were used as a basis for this study (Witte, Aßmann & Lecher, 1995). We concentrated on those areas that focused on empirical investigations.

Two independent raters used a classification system to allocate the justifications to the four ethical positions. Apart from very few minor deviations the values tallied extremely well. There were no personal statements, i.e., hedonistic and intuitionist justifications did not occur.

We limited ourselves to the quantitative relationship between utilitarian and deontological justifications (see Table 5).

Table 5: Number of utilitarian (u) and deontological (d) justifications in three Ethical Standards SOZ, BDP, APA

<b>Ethical Standards</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U/D</b>
<b>SOZ</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0.42</b>
<b>BDP</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0.50</b>
<b>APA</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0.50</b>
<b>Sum</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>0.47</b>

For justifications in terms of "Ethical Standards" the relationship between utilitarianism and deontology regardless of professional application and culture were extremely similar and diametrically opposed to public behavior. Utilitarian statements can also be regarded as justifications for the deviation from rules (deontological statements), e.g., it was agreed that subjects should be fully informed about the investigation; deception was only permitted, because this was the only way of obtaining results that could be compared to real-life behavior outside the laboratory. At the end of the experiment this deviation was then compensated by debriefing.

## Conclusions

These and other results have led to two lines of development. First, the intensification of research into the value level in the field of social psychology as alluded to above and second, the study of practical problems based on the four ethical positions and the respective preferences shown by certain cultures, professional groups or individuals. The differences in weighting these justifications lead to misunderstandings and conflicts because no party is willing to consider the justification level of the others, which finally results in everyone speaking at cross purposes. With this in mind it would be plausible, for example, to expand

the concept of mediation (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Witte, 1994,a) to specifically include the value perspective. By employing this approach some conflicts could be avoided or dissolved (Tyler & Blader, 2000). At the same time an ethical analysis should be carried through to ensure that the discussion proceeds in a manner which corresponds to these four ethical standpoints. The idea is to select those alternatives for action that comply with the four positions as closely as possible. This is a means of identifying actions that lend themselves more readily for justifications. It also makes it possible to obtain indications for future decisions, if appropriate scenarios are enacted and the justifications for these scenarios are studied in greater detail. It is feasible that the quality of the decision is partially determined by the factual level but also in part by the value level. The relationship between these two levels naturally depends on the type of decision being made, but one can assume that when issues become more complex both levels are always addressed. The scheme outlined here provides certain guidelines for professional use with the aim of differentiated discussion of value levels that tries to exclude the premature intrusion of preferences. In addition, on the individual level an understanding of the motivation model of a respective employee will enable the construction of an individual incentive system so that management tasks can be carried out with greater focus. It may well be that certain motivation models in the form of patterns of justification for one's own work performance are sometimes more and sometimes less appropriate depending on the type of position or task (team work, sales representatives or other employees working outside the firm). Arriving at answers to questions such as these naturally means that further studies have to be carried out. This more applied perspective is, of course, only an example of the usefulness of this approach. One could conclude by saying that all conflicts between groups based on values have their roots in the differences in weighting ethical positions. There is an urgent need to gain a deeper understanding of these conflicts. This is one approach in this direction.

## References

- Anderson, C.A.; Krull, D.S. & Weiner, B. (1996). Explanations: Processes and consequences. In: E.T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (1996). *Social Psychology. Handbook of basic principles*. (pp. 271-296). New York: Guilford Press.
- Batson, C.D. (1998). Altruism and prosocial behavior. In : D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.). *Handbook of social psychology*. (Vol.2 , 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp.282-316.). Boston, M: McGraw-Hill.

- Berkel, K. (1998): Führungsethik: Organisationspsychologische Perspektiven. In : Blickle, G. (Hg.): *Ethik in Organisationen*. Göttingen, 117-136.
- Blasi, A. (1980). Bridging moral cognition and moral action: A critical review of the literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 1-45.
- Blickle, G. (Hg.): *Ethik in Organisationen*. Göttingen.
- Colby, A. & Kohlberg, L. (1987). *Theoretical foundations and research validation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flanagan, O. (1991). *Varieties of moral personality. Ethics and psychological realism*. Cambridge, M.: Harvard University Press.
- Flanagan, O. & Oksenberg Rorty, A. (Eds.) (1990). *Identity, character, and morality*. Cambridge, M.: MIT Press.
- Forsyth, D. R. (1980). A taxonomy of ethical ideologies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 175-184.
- Fritzsche, B. A.; Finkelstein, M. A. & Penner, L. A. (2000). To help or not to help: Capturing individuals' decision policies. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 28, 561-578.
- Gollenia, M. C. (1999): *Ethische Entscheidungen und Rechtfertigungen unter der besonderen Bedingung der sozialen Identität*. Bern: Lang.
- Greenberg, J. (1996). *The quest for justice: Essays and experiments*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.
- Hackel, St. (1995): *Berufliche Sozialisation und Identität Ost- and West German Arbeitnehmer*. Wetzlar: Kletsmeier.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Inglehardt, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization. Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Klages, H. & Gensicke, Th. (1999): *Wertewandel und bürgerliches Engagement an der Schwelle zum 21. Jahrhundert*. Speyer: Speyerer Forschungsberichte.
- Kurtine, W. M.; Azmitia, M. & Gewirtz, J. L. (Eds.) (1992). *The role of values in psychology and human development*. New York: Wiley.
- Löhr, A. (1998): Die moralische Urteilskraft von Wirtschaftsstudenten – Bemerkungen zum empirischen Stand. In: Blickle, G. (Hg.): *Ethik in Organisationen*. Göttingen, 185-208.
- Maeng, Y.-J. (1996): *Ethische Positionen als Handlungsrechtfertigung interpersonalen Handlungen*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Pruitt, D. G. & Carnevale, P. J. (1993). *Negotiation in social conflict*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Read, S. J. & Miller, L. C. (1998). *Connectionist and PDP models of social reasoning*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.



- Reichle, B. & Schmitt, M. (Hg.) (1998). *Verantwortung, Gerechtigkeit und Moral*. Weinheim: Juventa.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992): Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical test in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1-65.
- Seligman, C.; Olson, J. M. & Zanna, M. P. (Eds.) (1996). *The psychology of values*. Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Sharp, F. C. (1897/98): An objective study of some moral judgments. *American Journal of Psychology* 9, 198-234.
- Sharp, F. C. (1908). *A study of the influence of custom on the moral judgment*. Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, No. 236. Madison.
- Steinvorth, U. (1990). *Klassische und moderne Ethik*. Reinbeck: rororo.
- Sternberg, E. (2000<sup>2</sup>). *Just business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995): *Individualism & Collectivism*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Tyler, T.R. & Blader, S.L. (2000). *Cooperation in groups. Procedural justice, social identity, and behavioral engagement*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Tyler, T.R. & Smith, H.J. (1998). Social justice and social movements. In : D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.). *Handbook of social psychology*. (Vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 595-629.) New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weiner, B. (1995). *Judgments of responsibility: A foundation for a theory of social conduct*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Witte, E. H. (1994). *Lehrbuch Sozialpsychologie*. Weinheim.
- Witte, E.H. (Hg.) (1994,a): Mediation. *Gruppendynamik*, Heft 3. Opladen: Leske & Budrich.
- Witte, E. H. (Hg.) (1995): *Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung*. Lengerich.
- Witte, E. H. & Doll, J. (1995). Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung: Zur Rechtfertigung von Handlungen. In : Witte, Erich H. (Hg.): *Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung*. (pp. 97-115). Lengerich: Pabst.



Universität Hamburg

## Hamburger Forschungsberichte -HAFOS-

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| HAFOS Nr. 1<br>1992  | Witte, E.H.: The extended group situation theory (EGST), social decision schemes, models of the structure of communication in small groups, and specific effects of minority influences and selfcategorization: An integration. |
| HAFOS Nr. 2<br>1992  | Witte, E.H. & Scherm, M.: Technikfolgenabschätzung und Gentechnologie - Die exemplarische Prüfung eines Expertenberichts auf psychologische Konsistenz und Nachvollziehbarkeit.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 3<br>1992  | Witte, E.H.: Dynamic models of social influence in small group research.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 4<br>1993  | Witte, E.H. & Sonn, E.: Trennungs- und Scheidungsberatung aus der Sicht der Betroffenen: Eine empirische Erhebung.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 5<br>1993  | Witte, E.H., Dudek, I. & Hesse, T.: Personale und soziale Identität von ost- und westdeutschen Arbeitnehmern und ihre Auswirkung auf die Intergruppenbeziehungen.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 6<br>1993  | Hackel, S., Zülske, G., Witte, E.H. & Raum, H.: Ein Vergleich berufsrelevanter Eigenschaften von „ost- und westdeutschen“ Arbeitnehmern am Beispiel der Mechaniker.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 7<br>1994  | Witte, E.H., The Social Representation as a consensual system an correlation analysis.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 8<br>1994  | Doll, J., Mentz, M. & Witte, E.H., Einstellungen zur Liebe und Partnerschaft: vier Bündungsstile.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 9<br>1994  | Witte, E.H.: A statistical inference strategy (FOSTIS): A non-confounded hybrid theory.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 10<br>1995 | Witte, E.H. & Doll, J.: Soziale Kognition und empirische Ethikforschung: Zur Rechtfertigung von Handlungen  |
| HAFOS Nr. 11<br>1995 | Witte, E.H.: Zum Stand der Kleingruppenforschung.   |

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| HAFOS Nr. 12<br>1995                  | Witte, E.H. & Wilhelm, M.: Vorstellungen über Erwartungen an eine Vorlesung zur Sozialpsychologie.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 13<br>1995                  | Witte, E.H.: Die Zulassung zum Studium der Psychologie im WS 1994/95 in Hamburg: Ergebnisse über die soziodemographische Verteilung der Erstsemester und die Diskussion denkbarer Konsequenzen. |
| HAFOS Nr. 14<br>1995                  | Witte, E.H. & Sperling, H.: Wie Liebesbeziehungen den Umgang mit Freunden geregelt wünschen: Ein Vergleich zwischen den Geschlechtern.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 15<br>1995                  | Witte, E.H.: Soziodemographische Merkmale der DoktorandInnen in Psychologie am Hamburger Fachbereich.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 16<br>1996                  | Witte, E.H.: Wertewandel in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (West) zwischen 1973 bis 1992: Alternative Interpretationen zum Ingelhart-Index.   |
| HAFOS Nr. 17<br>1996                  | Witte, E.H. & Silke Lecher: Systematik von Beurteilungskriterien für die Güte von Gruppenleistungen.  |
| HAFOS Nr. 18<br>1997                  | Witte, E.H. & Kaufman, J.: The Stepwise Hybrid Statistical Inference Strategy: FOSTIS   |
| HAFOS Nr. 19<br>1997                  | Kliche, T., Adam, S. & Jannink, H.: „Bedroht uns der Islam?“ Die Konstruktion eines „postmodernen“ Feindbildes am Beispiel Algerien in zwei exemplarischen Diskursanalysen                      |
| HAFOS Nr. 20<br>1998                  | Witte, E.H. & Frank von Pablocki: Unterschiede im Handlungsstil: Lage- und Handlungsorientierung in Problemlöse-Dyaden  |
| HAFOS Nr. 21<br>1998                  | Witte, E.H., Sack, P.-M. & Kaufman, J.: Synthetic Interaction and focused Activity in Sustainment of the Rational Task-Group  |
| HAFOS Nr. 22<br>1999                  | Bleich, C., Witte, E.H. & Durlanik, T.: Soziale Identität und Partnerwahl: Partnerpräferenzen von Deutschen und Türken der zweiten Generation   |
| HAFOS Nr. 23<br>Anforderungs-<br>1999 | Porschke, C.: Zur Entwicklung unternehmensspezifischer<br><br>profile mit der Repertory Grid Technik:<br>Ergebnisse einer empirischen Studie  |
| HAFOS Nr. 24<br>2000                  | Witte, E.H. & Putz, Claudia: Routinebesprechungen:<br>Deskription, Intention, Evaluation und Differenzierung  |
| HAFOS Nr. 25<br>psycho-<br>2000       | Witte, E.H.: Kundenorientierung: Eine Managementaufgabe mit<br><br>logischem Feingefühl   |

HAFOS Nr. 26 2000	Witte, E.H.: Die Entwicklung einer Gruppenmoderationstheorie für Projektgruppen und ihre empirische Überprüfung
HAFOS Nr. 27 2000	Figen Karadayi: Exposure to a different culture and related autonomous self: A comparison of remigrant and nonmigrant turkish late adolescent groups
HAFOS Nr. 28 2000	Witte, E.H. & Raphael, Christiane: Alter, Geschlecht und Informationsstand als Determinanten der Einstellung zum Euro
HAFOS Nr. 29 2001	Witte, E.H.: Bindung und romantische Liebe: Sozialpsychologische Aspekte der Bindungstheorie
HAFOS Nr. 30 2001	Witte, E.H.: Theorien zur sozialen Macht
HAFOS Nr. 31 2001	Witte, E.H.: Wertewandel, wirtschaftliche Prozesse und Wählerverhalten: Sozialpsychologische Gesetzmäßigkeiten zur Erklärung und Bekämpfung von Ausländerfeindlichkeit
HAFOS Nr. 32 2001	Lecher, Silke & Witte, E. H.: FORMOD und PROMOD: State of the Art der Moderation des Gruppenproblemlösens
HAFOS Nr. 33 2001	Porschke, Christine & Witte, E. H.: Psychologische Faktoren der Steuergerechtigkeit
HAFOS Nr. 34 2001	Tettenborn, Annette: Zeitgemäßes Lernen an der Universität: „Neuer Wein in alte Schläuche?“
HAFOS Nr. 35 2001	Witte, Erich H.: Wirtschaftspsychologische Ursachen politischer Prozesse: Empirische Belege und ein theoretisches Konzept
HAFOS Nr. 36 2001	Witte, Erich H.: Der Köhler-Effekt: Begriffsbildung, seine empirische Überprüfung und ein theoretisches Konzept.
HAFOS Nr. 37 2001	Diverse: Zwischen Couch, Coaching und ‚neuen kleinen Feldern‘ – Perspektiven Angewandter Psychologie. Beiträge zum 75jährigen Jubiläum der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Angewandten Psychologie e.V.

Die Hamburger Forschungsberichte werden herausgegeben von  
Prof. Dr. Erich H. Witte  
Psychologisches Institut I der Universität Hamburg  
e-mail: witte\_e\_h@uni-hamburg.de