



Máster Universitario en  
Neurociencia Cognitiva  
y del Comportamiento

## **Seminario "Moral appraisals guide intuitive legal determinations"**

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Moral appraisals guide intuitive legal determinations

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Date and time: April 22nd at 12:30

Place: Sala de conferencias 1 (CIMCYC)

We sought to understand how basic competencies in moral reasoning influence the interpretation and application of private, legal, and institutional rules. We predicted that moral appraisals, implicating both outcome-based and mental state reasoning, would shape participants' application of various rules and statutes—and asked whether such effects arise differentially under intuitive versus reflective reasoning conditions. In six vignette-based experiments (total  $N = 2502$ ), participants considered a wide range of written rules and laws and were asked to decide whether a protagonist had violated the statute in question. We manipulated morally relevant aspects of each incident—including the valence of the statute's purpose (Experiment 1) and of the outcomes that ensued (Experiments 2 and 3), as well as the protagonist's accompanying mental state (Experiment 5). In two studies, we simultaneously varied whether participants decided under time pressure or following a forced delay (Experiments 4 and 6). Integrative moral appraisals of the rule's purpose, the agent's extraneous blameworthiness and their epistemic state impacted legal determinations, helping to explain participants' departure from rules' literal interpretation. These counter-literal verdicts were stronger under time pressure and were weakened by the opportunity to reflect. Our results shed light on the cognitive basis of legal reasoning: Intuitive legal determinations build on core competencies in moral cognition, including outcome-based and mental state reasoning. In turn, cognitive control dampens these effects on statutory interpretation, giving rise to a



broadly textualist response pattern.