

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

Experimental Philosophy, Situationist Empirical Psychology, and Libertarian Paternalism

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Abstract:

According to Situationism, a recent development in analytic philosophy, ethical theory needs to be rebuilt from the ground up because of experimental psychological studies which show that apparently impertinent contextual and situational factors – such as the temperature and the color of items in our environment – significantly influence our ethical deliberations and decisions. Presently, the debate about situationism is centering on the concept of character in virtue-ethics. We believe, however, that situationism has far-reaching implications that have not received the attention they deserve. In particular, we suspect that situationism poses a challenge to many current theories of human agency and moral responsibility and that an adequate account of human agency, which is compatible with situationism, would give further support to “libertarian paternalism”, a promising model for political decision-making.

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